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Anxiety drug Pregabalin linked to rising deaths

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India won't tailor policy for Tesla, says Goyal

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DC pull off last-ball thriller

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Crescent moon sighted in Saudi Arabia and UAE

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

The crescent moon of Ramadan was sighted in Saudi Arabia and UAE on Sunday and is expected to be seen from India on Monday. Saudi and UAE gear up to mark the first fast of Ramadan 2024 on 11 March. India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and other countries usually see the moon a day after Saudi. Ramadan may begin in India a day later, that is taraweeh from the evening of 11 March and first fast on 12 March, Ramadan 1445 AH, depending upon the sighting of the crescent moon on 11 March evening after maghrib prayers. The moon sighting before Ramadan, also known as Ramzan/Ramazan/ Ramzaan, determines the commencement of the month of fasting from dawn until sunset along with acts of charity and worship. Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, during which they abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, evil thoughts and action.

—Salar News

BYJU's gives full payment to 25% employees

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Edtech major Think and Learn, which owns BYJU's brand, has released the full salary of 25 per cent of employees in the lower pay scale on Sunday while it has made partial payment to the rest of the workforce, according to sources. BYJU's management wrote two sets of letters to employees informing them about salary payment through alternate fund arrangements and mentioning financial constraints the company is facing due to the blocking of funds by a select group of investors. "We processed your salary for February late at night on Friday. However, due to yesterday being a second Saturday and on account of the long weekend, we expect the salaries to be reflected in your accounts on Monday. We sincerely apologise for any inconvenience caused by this delay," BYJU's management said. A group of four investors of BYJU's has filed a mismanagement suit against the management before the National Company Law Tribunal Bengaluru Bench, seeking to oust founders and appoint a new board.

—PTI

PHOTO: SALAR

NCB, police seize 1,596 kg ganja in Bidar

BIDAR, 10 MARCH

In a breakthrough, Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) and Bidar police team jointly conducted a massive crackdown, resulting in the recovery of a staggering Rs 1,550 crore worth of ganja. The officials seized 1596kg ganja, and arrested two people. The illicit ganja was being transported from Andhra Pradesh to Maharashtra through Bidar in a lorry. Acting on specific intelligence, the joint team of NCB and Bidar police launched a rigorous operation near Wanmarpalli check post in Aurad taluk of Bidar district. Additionally, the driver and cleaner responsible for the illegal transportation of ganja were also held. NCB police have also seized the lorry which was used for transportation. A case has been registered at Aurad police station and an investigation is on.

—Salar News

India, EFTA ink free trade deal to promote investment

Govt has received investment commitment of $100B for 15 years

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

India and the four-nation European bloc European Free Trade Association (EFTA) on Sunday signed a free trade agreement under which New Delhi has received an investment commitment of USD 100 billion over the next 15 years to facilitate the creation of one million jobs.

EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland. The agreement was signed after a gap of almost 16 years as negotiations, started in 2008, but were put on hold in November 2013.

Talks resumed in October 2016, and after 21 rounds of negotiations were held before its conclusion.

For the first time in the history of FTAs (free trade agreements), a legal commitment is being made to promoting target-oriented investment and the job creation. Almost all the domestic industrial goods would get duty-free access in EFTA nations under the agreement, besides duty concessions on processed agricultural products. Switzerland, the major trading partner of India in the bloc, already removed duties from January this year on almost all industrial goods.

Union Minister for Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal during the signing of EFTA Agreement, in New Delhi on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

On the other hand, India is offering 82.7 per cent of its tariff lines or product categories, which covers 95.3 per cent of EFTA exports of which more than 80 per cent of imports is gold.

On gold, India has not touched the effective customs duty (which is 15 per cent) but has reduced the bound rate by one per cent to 39 per cent. India will also provide duty concessions on certain PLI (production-linked incentive) sectors like pharma, medical devices and processed food.

Sensitivities related to these sectors have been kept in mind while extending offers. Sectors such as dairy, soya, coal and sensitive agricultural products are kept on the exclusion list, which means there would not be any duty concessions on these goods.

In the services sector, the commerce ministry said, India has offered 105 sub-sectors to the EFTA like accounting, business services, computer services, distribution and health.

Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) would stimulate our services exports in sectors of our key strength/interest such as IT services, business services, personal, cultural, sporting and recreational services, other education services, and audio-visual services.

Further commitments related to Intellectual Property Rights in TEPA are at the TRIPS (trade-related aspects of IPRs) level.

TEPA would also provide an opportunity to integrate into EU markets. Over 40 per cent of Switzerland's global services exports are to the EU (European Union). The agreement has 14 chapters, including trade in goods, rules of origin, IPRs, trade in services, investment promotion and cooperation, government procurement, technical barriers to trade and trade facilitation.

—PTI

'RAIL ROKO' PROTEST

Farmers squat on tracks, trains come to a halt

Farmers block railway tracks during their 'rail roko' protest, in Patiala, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

CHANDIGARH, 10 MARCH

Agitating farmers on Sunday squatted on railway tracks at many places in Punjab as part of a nationwide 'rail roko' protest affecting the movement of several train

The protest, called by the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha to press the Centre to accept their demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP), was held from 12 noon till 4 pm.

They sat on tracks at many locations in 22 districts, including Amritsar, Ludhiana and Bathinda. Because of the disruption of train services, passengers experienced inconvenience.

According to railway authorities, nine trains including Firozpur to Bathinda, Jalandhar City to Hoshiarpur, and Jalandhar City to Pathankot were cancelled and many trains were either short-terminated or short-originated.

Farmer leaders Sarwan Singh Pandher and Jagjit Singh Dallewal claimed that their 'rail roko' agitation was successful.

"Till a concrete resolution is offered by the government to our demands, we will continue our struggle," Pandher said.

They claimed that the 'rail roko' protest was held at 75 locations in Punjab, five in Haryana, three each in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and 20 locations in Tamil Nadu.

Bharti Kisan Union (Ekta Ugrahan), BKU (Dakaunda-Dhaner) and Krantikari Kisan Union - farmer bodies that are part of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) - also participated in the 'rail roko' agitation.

But SKM, which had spearheaded the farmers' 2020-21 agitation against the now-scrapped three central agriculture laws, is not part of the 'Delhi Chalo' protest but has extended its support to the ongoing farmers' agitation.

In Ferozepur, Inderjit Singh Bath, District President of the Kisan Majdoor Sangharsh Committee, condemned Haryana police action against farmers at the Shambhu and Khanauri border points.

—PTI

Cong flays Didi for going solo in WB

MURSHIDABAD, 10 MARCH

After Trinamool Congress (TMC) dumped Congress by announcing its candidates for all 42 seats in West Bengal, including a surprise nomination for Yousuf Pathan from the Berhampore Lok Sabha seat for the upcoming polls, state Congress President Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury on Sunday claimed that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee is fearful of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP.

"Mamata is worried that if she joins the Opposition bloc INDIA, she will have to face Modi. She is worried that if Enforcement Directorate and CBI start visiting TMC on Modi's orders, it could pose a risk to the party. She is afraid of BJP and that's why she is changing her stance. So, by distancing herself from the alliance, Mamata is sending a message to Modi's office: Don't be upset with me; I'm not part of the alliance and I won't compete with the BJP," he said.

"Mamata has no problem if BJP wins instead, that's why former Indian cricketer Yusuf Pathan was nominated from here. Her main aim is to defeat me," he said. Pathan has been fielded from Berhampore, where Congress heavyweight, Adhir Chowdhury is a sitting MP.

Mamata Banerjee **PHOTO: PTI**

TMC has fielded Mahua Moitra, the expelled Lok Sabha member, from Krishnanagar. Mamata's nephew, Abhishek Banerjee, announced the TMC candidates at a show of strength in the heart of Kolkata onV Sunday.

As expected, Abhishek Banerjee is on the TMC ticket from Diamond Harbour, while Pathan has been fielded from Berhampore. He will be pitted against Congress heavyweight Chowdhury.

While Banerjee asserted that her party, a partner of INDIA on the national stage, will contest Lok Sabha polls in West Bengal and asserted that her party will confront not only BJP but also CPI (M) and Congress in the state.

—ANI/ PTI

>>>More on Page 3

ROW OVER 'DEBT'

CM launches ₹600 cr projects, challenges BJP to debate

BENGALURU/ HOSKOTE, 10 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday challenged BJP leaders for an open discussion over BJP's comments that the government does not have enough money for development.

Speaking at the convention of beneficiaries of the government guarantees scheme in Hoskote, he said, "Opposition parties are constantly creating lies and giving wrong information to the people that there is no money left in the treasury for development works by implementing guarantees. But today development programmes worth Rs 600 crore have been launched here."

Siddaramaiah called BJP leaders as liars and said that the State exchequer is not empty. "We have implemented five guarantees within nine months of coming to power and despite the cost of 36 thousand crores, our treasury is not empty. Rs 1.20 lakh crore has been earmarked for development in the budget. I have presented a budget of Rs 3.71 lakh crore for 2024-25. The size of our budget is bigger than the budget of previous BJP's time," Siddaramaiah said.

Siddaramaiah **PHOTO: PTI**

> **Opposition are constantly creating lies and giving wrong information to the people that there is no money left. But today projects worth Rs 600 crore have been launched here**
>
> -Siddaramaiah, Chief Minister

He also said the money of the guarantee schemes being given directly to the hands of the people of the State is being done without hassle of middlemen.

"Rs 2000 is being distributed to 52,000 women under the Gruhalakshmi scheme. And because of the guarantee schemes people are saving at least Rs 4,000-5,000 per family," said Siddaramaiah.

Attacking the previous BJP's tenure, he said, "There was a BJP government from 2008-2013. At that time, no attention was paid to the projects of treating the wastewater and filling the lakes. The lakes in Kolar, Chikkaballapur, Bangalore Gram, Tumakuru and Anekal constituencies have dried up and the lake was filled through the KC Valley, HC Valley, Sanekal and Hosakete projects to fill them". Speaking about the water related projects in the State, Siddaramaiah said, "We did water filling work for Nelamangala and Tumakuru districts. Rs 150 crore have been spent on the project of filling water to 38 lakes which was inaugurated today. Our government has spent Rs 2,809 crore for KC Valley, HN Valley, Anekal, Hoskote projects. 317 lakes have been filled in the first phase. Rs 1,699 crore are being spent on the second phase works which are in various stages of progress. 392 lakes are being filled. We will also take up the new Nandagudi Sulibele project and treat the wastewater and fill the lake."

He also added that all these projects will enhance the income of farmers.

—Salar News

Make us win to amend Preamble, says BJP MP

KARWAR, 10 MARCH

Six years since Anantkumar Hegde said BJP would change the Constitution to do away with the word "secular" in its preamble, BJP MP on Sunday said that to amend the Constitution, the public must ensure two-thirds majority for the saffron party in Lok Sabha.

BJP needs a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament to amend the Constitution and "set right distortions and unnecessary additions made to it by Congress", Hedge said, addressing a gathering here, going on to explain the numbers required to amend the preamble of the Constitution.

The party would also need to come to power in more than 20 States for this, he said.

"If the Constitution has to be amended -- the Congress fundamentally distorted the Constitution by forcefully filling unnecessary things in it, especially by bringing in laws that were aimed at suppressing the Hindu society -- if all of this has to be changed it is not possible with this (current) majority.

—PTI

Cheetah Gamini gives birth to five cubs

BHOPAL, 10 MARCH

Cheetah 'Gamini' on Sunday gave birth to five cubs in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh, taking the total number of the big cats in the country to 26, Union Minister Bhupender Yadav said. Taking to social media platform X, the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change said, "High Five, Kuno! Female cheetah Gamini, aged about five years, brought from Tswalu Kalahari Reserve, South Africa, has given birth to 5 cubs today." The number of cheetah cubs born in India now stands at 13, the minister added.

This is the fourth cheetah litter on Indian soil and the first litter of cheetahs brought from South Africa, Yadav informed. "Congra tulations to all, especially the team of forest officers, vets, and field staff who have ensured a stress-free environment for cheetahs, which has led to successful mating and birth of the cubs. The total number of cheetahs, including cubs in Kuno National Park, is 26.

—PTI

Cheetah 'Gamini' gave birth to five cubs in Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh **PHOTO: X RISHIBAGREE**

SOP INITIATED

K'taka, TN, Kerala to combat human-animal conflict

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Karnataka Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwara Khandre and his Kerala counterpart AK Saseendran on Sunday chaired a meeting of top forest officials of their states and Tamil Nadu near Bandipur Tiger Reserve's safari centre to discuss adopting a joint Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to manage human-animal conflict.

Khandre, in a statement issued by his office about the meeting, said that the three states have decided to work together to prevent human-wildlife conflict and poaching, and to conserve forests and wildlife.

There have been several incidents of wild animals attacking and killing humans in the three states in recent months **PHOTO: PTI**

There have been several incidents of wild animals attacking and killing humans in the three states in recent months -- and it has become a major issue in Kerala, with people living near forested areas holding major protests against the state government for doing little to prevent the loss of life and property.

Noting that wild animals roam freely from one forest to another and between the states, Khandre said that measures have been discussed to reduce damage to lives and crops from wildlife in any of the states.

> The growing populations of humans and wildlife and the expansion of human habitats to the fringes of the forest have contributed to a rise in cases of human-wildlife, Khandre said, adding, "Every living thing born on this earth has the right to live

The growing populations of humans and wildlife and the expansion of human habitats to the fringes of the forest have contributed to a rise in cases of human-wildlife, Khandre said, adding, "Every living thing born on this earth has the right to live."

He asserted that it is essential for people living on the edges of forests to learn to coexist with wildlife.

Stating that cooperation is also necessary for the elimination of invasive species of weeds such as senna and lantana, he said that the three states have proposed to set up an advisory committee for technology adoption and weed destruction.

The collaborative initiatives discussed in the meeting include: Informed decision making based on wildlife numbers and through coordinated operations, and a proposal to constitute an advisory council comprising wildlife conservation experts to provide valuable insights to enhance conflict management strategies, among others.

—PTI

KPCC coordinator fined ₹50,000 for illegal flexes

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) on Sunday charged Rajeev Gowda, KPCC Co-ordinator and founder chairman of ABD group, a fine of Rs 50,000 for putting up unauthorised flexes in Sankey road, near Rain Tree hotel, Vasanth Nagar. Gowda had put up flexes on 7 March wishing Food and Civil Supplies Minister KH Muniyappa on his birthday. Gowda did not obtain prior permission from BBMP officials to put up the flexes, according to the notice issued to him by Assistant Revenue Officer, BBMP, Vasanth Nagar. Following the court orders, BBMP banned unauthorised flexes across Bengaluru in 2023.

—Salar News

101-year-old Ram temple in Nippani gets bomb threat

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Authorities in Karnataka are on high alert after two letters threatening to bomb the historic Sri Ram Mandir in Nippani town near Belagavi were discovered. The temple management received the letters on 7 and 28 February, with the most recent one specifying 20-21 March as the target date. The letters, written in Hindi and bearing the phrase "Allahu Akbar," were found within the temple complex. At least 14 CCTV cameras have been installed, and a platoon of district Armed Reserve has been deployed near the temple. The State's Minister for Muzarai has also directed officials to enhance security at all temples across Karnataka.

—Salar News

Uttara Kannada to provide Wi-Fi to attract tourists

KARWAR, 10 MARCH

Uttara Kannada district is stepping into the future of connectivity with the launch of Wi-Fi7 services. The new service aims to promote tourism in the region. Wi-Fi-7 service offers unparalleled high-speed internet even in remote areas like Yana nestled within dense forests. The innovative Wi-Fi-7 service is the result of collaboration between Bharat AirFi, BSNL, and GNA, leveraging cutting-edge Japanese technology to provide seamless connectivity to tourists and locals alike. The service was launched by MP Ananth Kumar Hegde which marks a significant milestone in enhancing digital infrastructure in the region. Tourists can purchase different data packs based on their needs using QR codes. The rates of the package start at just Rs 100. According to the local sources plans are underway to upgrade to Wi-Fi-7 within the next 2-3 months.

—Salar News

5 lakh farmers to get insurance by March end: Min

MANDYA, 10 MARCH

State agriculture Minister N Cheluvarayaswamy said that the agricultural season has progressed, and Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana crop insurance has garnered significant participation, with Rs 25 lakh farmers registering for coverage this year in the State. Cheluvarayaswamy said that by the end of March, an impressive sum of Rs 1,400 crores in crop insurance will be distributed to support 13 lakh farmers, with Rs 600 crores already disbursed to benefit 8 lakh farmers. He assured that the remaining Rs 800 crores will be paid out by the end of March. Speaking at the privilege distribution conference and International Women's Day programme in Nagamangala taluk, on Saturday, the Minister highlighted the government's commitment to agricultural development. Notably, the construction of 7,500 agricultural wells in the Mandya district is underway, with plans to increase the number to 20,000 shortly. Emphasising inclusivity, the Minister underscored that five guarantee schemes are being extended to all sections of society without discrimination based on caste, creed, or gender.

—Salar News

Treated water to be filled in drying lakes

Aimed at replenishing groundwater, it is expected to contribute 2,030 MLD of water to the system

A dried up Ullal lake in Bengaluru as the State faces severe drought and water shortage this year **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

- Meanwhile, BWSSB has extended the registration deadlines for water tanker owners till 15 March aimed at encouraging more water suppliers

Aimed at managing the water crisis in City civic authorities in City have decided to fill the drying lakes with 1,300 million litres per day of treated water to replenish groundwater sources in the City, where about 50 per cent of the borewells have dried up.

Civic body Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) will also install filter borewells and construct water plants using an innovative technology near the restored lake beds to supply water after testing, officials said.

This initiative has been taken up in association with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), BWSSB Chairman Ram Prasath Manohar said, adding that this is expected to add about 2030 MLD of water into the system.

The Irrigation Department is supplying water in Devanahalli, where Kempegowda International Airport is located, by treating the water from Kote Lake with a similar initiative.

As part of the plan, lakes in Bellandur, Varthur, Nayandahalli, Herohalli, Attur and Jakkur will be refilled initially.

Pointing out that Bengaluru requires 2,100 MLD of potable water, out of which 1,450 MLD comes from the Cauvery River, officials sought to ensure that there is sufficient water in the reservoirs to last till July.

The city needs about eight thousand million cubic feet (TMC) from March to May while there is 34 TMC water in reservoirs.

The remaining 650 MLD of the City's water requirement comes from borewell water.

There is a 250 MLD deficit here largely due to lack of rains, depleting underground water levels and exploitation of groundwater, they added.

Meanwhile, BWSSB has extended the registration deadlines for water tanker owners till 15 March aimed at encouraging more water suppliers. As of date, 1,530 tankers have registered, officials said.

"About 50 per cent of the borewells in the city have dried up. We have decided to take control of thousands of private water tankers (by registering) to supply water from sources outside the city. We have left the pricing to officials as factors like distance travelled determines costs. Unused milk tankers will be used to ferry water," Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar said.

Meanwhile, Opposition BJP has planned a protest in the City today against the alleged mismanagement of the water crisis.

Responding to this, Shivakumar said, "If they give any constructive suggestions, we are certainly open to considering them.

—PTI

Permission now must for drilling borewell

BENAGLURU, 10 MARCH

Starting from 15 March, individuals can apply for permission to drill borewells on the Bengaluru Jalmandal website **PHOTO: PTI**

Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has issued a notice stating that borewells should only be drilled in locations where permission has been granted. BWSSB Chairman V Ram Prasat Manohar said that action will be taken against those who drill borewells in unauthorised areas.

He further noted that under section 11 of the Karnataka Groundwater (Development and Management Regulations and Control) Act, 2011, legal action will be taken against the owners of borewells drilled without obtaining permission from the relevant authority. This directive will come into effect from 15 March.

Starting from 15 March, individuals can apply for permission to drill borewells on the Bengaluru Jalmandal website. Priority will be given to public borewells, and private ones will be considered based on factors such as groundwater levels, requirements, and expert assessments.

The dwindling groundwater levels in Bengaluru due to insufficient rainfall have led to many borewells drying up. Hence, obtaining permission from the concerned authorities in the City is now mandatory under the Karnataka Groundwater (Regulation and Control of Development and Management) Act, 2011.

The deadline for self-registration of tankers has been extended until 15 March, with 1,530 tankers already registered on the BBMP portal.

—Salar News

'Govt releasing Cauvery water for sake of polls'

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

R Ashoka **PHOTO: PTI**

Leader of Opposition R Ashoka criticised State government over the Cauvery water issue on Sunday saying, Congress has been releasing Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu because of the alliance for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Speaking to reporters, he said the government has been ignorant of the farmers' pleas. Although people are on the streets holding empty bins as water is scarce in Bengaluru the government has been in favour of the neighbouring state. Ashoka called Siddaramaiah led Congress government the "shameful government in history."

Regarding the repeated attack by the Congress against the Central government over the Mekedatu project he said, "They give up our drinking water for electioneering. They are always working to woo minorities for vote banks. They announced of implementing the Mekedatu scheme, but they are alleging that it is central government's job. In the budget, not a single penny has been given to the project."

"Congress leaders should resign if they are not able to bring drought relief to State." Ashoka said.

—Salar News

Kumaraswamy hits out at CM on drought issue

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

HD Kumaraswamy **PHOTO: PTI**

Former chief minister and JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy on Sunday attacked Chief Minister Siddaramaiah for ignoring people's sufferings during the drought situation in the State. He alleged that Siddaramaiah has been conducting meetings for guarantee schemes and is busy with the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

Comparing Siddaramaiah with Roman Emperor Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, he said, "Nero played violin while Rome was on fire. People are dying in the State without water and Siddaramaiah is least bothered to solve their problems."

"There is a drought unheard of in the history of the State. Siddaramaiah is nothing but a destroyer of people's lives. Despite all this, Congress government is spending crores of taxpayers' money on guarantee conferences. Shame!" said Kumaraswamy.

He also claimed that the government is mocking people's suffering. He questioned the need for such conferences when the State is encountering a difficult situation.

MHe also claimed that in the past year the government has spent all the money on advertising purposes.

—Salar News

All eyes on Mandya: BJP's call on seat watched

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

PHOTO: PTI

BJP top brass' decision regarding the Mandya Lok Sabha seat is keenly awaited with party-backed sitting Independent MP Sumalatha Ambareesh and its alliance partner JD(S) both making a strong pitch for the ticket.

While JD(S) has conveyed to BJP leadership that it wants to field its candidate, multilingual actress-turned-politician Sumalatha has also thrown her hat in the ring and wants to contest on a ticket from the national party.

JD(S) is firm on this seat-which is located between Bengaluru and Mysuru--as the constituency is dominated by Vokkaligas, the community that forms its strong voter base.

Incidentally in 2019, Sumalatha defeated the then chief minister Kumaraswamy's son Nikhil, the joint candidate of Congress-JD(S) alliance in Mandya, known in Kannada as 'Sakkare Naadu' (land of sugar).

However, BJP sources said that this time, the party may leave the Mandya seat to its alliance partner, This is despite many local leaders supporting Sumalatha's candidacy from the party and opposing the move to give the seat to JD(S).

Though there is pressure on Kumaraswamy to contest, former minister and ex-MP CS Puttaraju might get the ticket. Kumaraswamy has been maintaining that BJP high command will announce the decision.

"High Command (BJP) has to say, they have to make a decision. My decision, not to leave Mandya, is always strong," Sumalatha has said.

If BJP cedes Mandya's seat to JD(S), it remains to be seen whether Sumalatha will contest as an independent once again, as she did in 2019, after Congress denied her the ticket and gave it to JD(S).

—PTI

DRUG FREE KARNATAKA

Participants run after Chief Minister Siddaramaiah flags off 'Police Run Programme' in Bengaluru on Sunday, aimed at spreading awareness about drugs and narcotics while celebrating the golden jubilee year of State police **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

PM to launch various rail projects in City

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

In an attempt to boost infrastructure and connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate various rail projects in the Bengaluru division on Tuesday. It includes a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing passenger experience, promoting local businesses, and streamlining cargo movement.

According to a press release by South Western Railways, 40 'One Station One Product' (OSOP) stalls across 40 stations within the Bengaluru division will be established. The initiative announced in the 2022 Budget, provides platforms for local artisans, weavers, and craftsmen to showcase and sell their products. KSR Bengaluru, Yeshwanthpur and Krishnarajapuram stations will be among those benefiting from this programme.Modi will also flag off two new Vande Bharat Express trains connecting Bengaluru with Kalaburagi and Mysuru-Chennai. These semi-high-speed trains will provide a faster and more comfortable travel experience for passengers.

This suite of projects promises to improve the railway experience for passengers, and enhance freight movement in Bengaluru. *—Salar News*

AGAINST HC EXPANSION

Activists bat for saving Cubbon Park

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Participants raised slogans like "Save Cubbon Park" demanding the government reconsider the project **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Cubbon Park Walkers' Association (CPWA) had increased the stakes in their fight to protect Bengaluru's green space.

They held a unique protest against the proposed construction of a 10-story annex for the High Court within Cubbon Park, on Sunday.

This demonstration featured pet dogs, highlighting the park's importance for both human and canine well-being.

"This is our fourth protest against this planned project. Despite our previous efforts, the government has not budged. We hope this unique demonstration with our canine companions will highlight the importance of preserving Cubbon Park." S Umesh, President of CPWA, said to **Salar News.**

Participants raised slogans like "Save Cubbon Park" and "Protect Our Green Lungs" while demanding the government reconsider the project.

—Salar News

LS polls: DKS asks teachers to back Cong

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar requested the teaching fraternity of the City to support Congress in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls on Sunday.

Addressing the teachers at an event held to celebrate the victory of Puttanna in the teacher's constituency elections, Shivakumar said the demands of the teachers will all be fulfilled soon. "There are 50,000 teacher positions vacant in the State, and we are trying to set up 2,000 Karnataka Public schools under the Corporate Social Responsibility initiative. We will roll them out after the elections," said the minister.

Regarding BJP-JDS alliance, Shivakumar tagged the alliance as unholy. He said, "To keep BJP away from power, we extended our unconditional support to Kumaraswamy for 5 years. But, Yediyurappa, Yogeshwar and Muniratna brought the government down. Now, Kumaraswamy has joined hands with the same people."He claimed that during recent Rajya Sabha polls, BJP leaders offered Rs 50 crore to Congress leaders to cross-vote in favour of the alliance candidate. "Our senior leader Shyamanur Shivashankarappa was also offered money but their efforts were wasted," said Shivakumar.

—Salar News

BJP WORKERS OPPOSE MINISTER KARANDLAJE'S CANDIDATURE

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

Opposition against MP Shobha Karandlaje has reached a fever pitch as activists took to the streets, storming the party office to voice their dissent.

In a significant development, the election management committee convened on Sunday under the leadership of MLA Araga Gyanendra, along with prominent leaders including Bhanu Prakash.

Activists who gathered at the meeting emphatically stated their stance, demanding that Karandlaje should not be nominated as a candidate. Instead, they advocated for tickets to be allocated exclusively to candidates from Chikkamagaluru district. Expressing their discontent, they highlighted Karandlaje's alleged lack of familiarity with the party's block committee leaders despite serving as an MP for a decade.

Despite efforts by district unit president Devaraj Shetty and other leaders to mollify the agitated workers, tensions ran high, culminating in a protest outside the party office.

—Salar News

ARE THE RULES HELPING?

Activists raise concern over SSLC exam guidelines

BENGALURU, 10 MARCH

The new directive aims to minimise cheating incidents during the examinations **PHOTO: PTI**

City Child rights activists Nagasmiha Rao and S Umashree have raised concerns over the SSLC exam guidelines suggesting students should "turn their back" to deter cheating. The activists questioned the efficacy of the approach by the Education Department in fostering a safe and conducive exam environment.

Karnataka School Education Assessment Board (KSEAB) recently issued guidelines mandating that students sitting for the class 10 SSLC exams must face the wall during the test, with exams scheduled to commence on 25 March. On Sunday, a letter by the activists was sent to Primary and Higher Education Minister Madhu Banarappa regarding the issued guidelines. The Director of Child Rights Trust told **Salar News**, "We have suggested alternative approaches to creating a child-friendly exam environment. Recommendations include allowing students to visit exam centres day before to familiarise themselves with the surroundings, maintaining clean facilities, enforcing child protection rules, and providing counseling rather than punishment measures for cheating incidents."

KSEAB officials said that the seating arrangement serves to prevent cheating and reduce distractions during exams. Talking of the broader benefits of this measure, Director of KSEAB said that facing the wall helps students remain focused and unaware of external movements, thus minimising distractions.

Umashree, a child psychologist told **Salar News**, "We have observed instances of students panicking before exams due to stress from parents, and if the exam hall environment exacerbates this panic, there's a chance that some students may forget answers due to stress and might think of self-harm if the exam does not go well. Every student deals with stress differently, and it's a common occurrence."

—Salar News

Court extends Shajahan's CBI custody by 4 days

KOLKATA, 10 MARCH

A court in West Bengal's Basirhat on Sunday extended CBI custody of Shajahan Sheikh, a key accused in a mob attack on ED officials at Sandeshkhali, by another four days on a prayer by the central agency. Central Bureau of Investigation got custody of Sheikh on 6 March along with transfer of investigation on an order of Calcutta High Court. Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials were attacked when they went to raid the now-suspended Trinamool Congress leader's premises at Sandeshkhali. The court directed that Sheikh be produced before it again on 14 March. Sheikh was produced before Basirhat court, around 70 km away from Kolkata where he is in CBI custody, under tight security. ED officials were attacked by around 1000-strong mob when they went to search the premises of Sheikh at Sandeshkhali on 5 January in connection with the agency's investigation into an alleged ration distribution scam case, in which a former minister of the state has been arrested. —*PTI*

Ex-Cong ministers, ex-MLAs join BJP in Rajasthan

JAIPUR, 10 MARCH

Several Congress leaders in Rajasthan, including former ministers Rajendra Yadav and Lal Chand Kataria, joined BJP on Sunday ahead of the Lok Sabha elections. Former Congress MLAs Richpal Mirdha, Vijaypal Mirdha, Khiladi Bairwa, former independent MLA Alok Beniwal, former state party chief Seva Dal Suresh Chaudhary, Rampal Sharma, and Riju Jhunjhunwala among other leaders also joined the ruling party in the state. Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma, state BJP president CP Joshi and Union Minister Bhupendra Yadav welcomed them into the party at its state headquarters.—*PTI*

4 BRS leaders, 1 Cong leader from Telangana join BJP

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Four Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders, including two former MPs, and a Congress leader from Telangana joined BJP on Sunday as the ruling party looks to boost its Lok Sabha tally in the southern state. Those who joined the party are Godam Nagesh and Sitaram Nayak, both former MPs, former BRS MLAs Saidy Reddy and Jalagam Venkat Rao, and Srinivas Gomase, who was in Congress. The leaders praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. BJP leader and party parliamentary board member K Laxman welcomed them and said while the leaders of other parties are working for the future of their sons and daughters, Modi is working for the country. BJP general secretary Tarun Chugh said on the occasion that people are fed-up with "dynastic and corrupt" parties. —*PTI*

Over 1 cr Ayushman Bharat cards issued in Bihar in 6 days

PATNA, 10 MARCH

More than 1 crore health cards under 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' were issued in Bihar during a six-day special campaign from 2 March, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Chaudhary said. NDA government in the state has decided to provide "free medical treatment up to Rs 5 lakh every year to all ration card holders of the state under the Ayushman scheme", he said. According to data compiled by the state health department, the maximum number of Ayushman Bharat cards at 5,99,609 were issued in Siwan district in the six-day campaign, followed by 5,44,018 in Muzaffarpur, 5,00,292 in Patna and 4,72,977 in Madhubani. 'Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana' is a national public health insurance scheme of the central government, which aims at providing coverage for low-income earners in the country. It is a centrally sponsored scheme and is jointly funded by both the union government and the states. —*PTI*

TMC releases list for all 42 WB seats

Yusuf Pathan, Mahua Moitra figure in list

KOLKATA, 10 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee walks with party candidates for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls, during "Janagarjan Sabha" rally, at Brigade Parade Ground, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Trinamool Congress (TMC) on Sunday released its candidate roster for all 42 Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal, ushering a major overhaul by dropping seven incumbent MPs and introducing numerous new faces, including former cricketer Yusuf Pathan.

TMC maintained a harmonious blend of experienced leaders and fresh talent, amid the alleged power tussle between the old guards and the next-gen leaders. Film star-turned-politician Shatrughan Sinha, who won the Asansol seat in a by-poll on a TMC ticket in 2022, has been re-nominated, while former MP Haji Nurul Islam replaces actor Nusrat Jahan in the Basirhat Lok Sabha seat, where the trouble-torn Sandeshkhali is situated.

While 16 of 23 sitting MPs were retained, the TMC opted not to renominate seven incumbents and notably excluded BJP defector Arjun Singh from Barrackpore, who joined TMC two years ago.

Among the new faces are 12 women candidates and 26 individuals, including sitting MPs and previous contenders. Additionally, nine sitting MLAs, including two ministers from the West Bengal cabinet Partha Bhowmick and Biplab Mitra, have been thrust into the Lok Sabha battle.

Addressing a massive rally at Brigade Parade Grounds in Kolkata, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee explained, "I have fielded candidates, some people were dropped. Those who have not been renominated will be accommodated during the assembly polls.

Former cricketer Yusuf Pathan has been nominated from the Baharampur Lok Sabha seat, historically a stronghold of state Congress chief and five-term MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury.

Mahua Moitra, who was expelled from the Lok Sabha last year in cash for a query case, has been reaffirmed as the party's candidate for the Krishnanagar seat. Kirti Azad, a former cricketer and party leader, has been nominated for the Bardhaman-Durgapur constituency, previously lost to the BJP in 2019.

Notably, among the nine MLAs nominated for the Lok Sabha polls, BJP defectors Biswajit Das and Mukutmani Adhikari will contest from Bongaon and Ranaghat, strongholds of the Matua community, which TMC lost to the BJP in 2019.

TMC has also struck a balance between experienced leaders and new blood, with three-term MPs Sudip Bandopadhyay, Sougata Roy, Satabdi Roy, Kalyan Banerjee, and Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar being re-nominated from their respective seats.

The party has also introduced fresh faces like Saayoni Ghosh, Debangshu Bhattacharya, Gopal Lama, MLA June Maliah, Bapi Haldar, and actress Rachana Banerjee from the seats of Jadavpur, Tamluk, a stronghold of BJP leader Suvendu Adhikari, Darjeeling and Medinipur. —*PTI*

DAYS BEFORE POLLS

PM launches ₹42K cr projects in UP

AZAMGARH, 10 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath during the inauguration ceremony of various developmental projects, in Azamgarh, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated or laid the foundation stones of development projects worth more than Rs 42,000 crore across the country.

Of these, projects worth Rs 34,700 crore will come up in Uttar Pradesh, a majority of them involving the construction of airports or airport buildings.

Modi was accompanied by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other BJP leaders as he visited the Manduri area of Azamgarh district where he launched the projects and also addressed a rally.

Modi also inaugurated Maharaja Suhel Dev State University, Azamgarh, constructed at a cost of 108 crore. He inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of five major National Highway projects worth Rs 11,500 cr.

More than 5,342 km of roads built in 59 UP districts under the PM Gram Sadak Yojna worth Rs 3,700 cr were also inaugurated by him. He inaugurated and laid the foundation stone of 12 railway projects across UP worth Rs 8,200 cr.

Modi inaugurates 15 airport projects, including Delhi terminal

Modi on Sunday inaugurated 15 airport projects, including 12 new terminal buildings of almost worth Rs 10,000 crore in Uttar Pradesh's Azamgarh, marking the event to be the single biggest infra addition that will see a mix of new airports, expanded terminals, laying of foundation stones for upcoming airports and other related facilities.

The project launched by Modi includes 12 new terminal buildings of Pune, Kolhapur, Gwalior, Jabalpur, Delhi, Lucknow, Aligarh, Azamgarh, Chitrakoot, Moradabad, Shravasti, and Adampur Airports, along with laying of the foundation stone for new terminal buildings of Kadapa, Hubballi and Belagavi airports on Sunday.Further, the foundation stone was also laid for new terminal buildings in Datia, Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Rajahmundry to cater to demands in the future. AAI has also undertaken the development of three new terminal buildings at Kadapa, Hubballi, and Belagavi Airports at a total cost of Rs.908 crore. Once completed, the combined passenger handling capacity of these airports will increase to 95 lakh passengers per annum, as per the government. —*PTI/ANI*

CARE AND CURE

A patient undergoes check-up at a medical camp organised by Union Minister Anurag Thakur on completion of 10 lakh beneficiaries of MP Mobile Health Service, in Dehra, Himachal Pradesh on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

GOANS SEEK BUS CONNECTIVITY TO VOTE IN LS POLLS

COTIGAO, 10 MARCH

After boycotting the 2019 Lok Sabha elections to highlight their demand for a road, the residents of a hamlet housing 30 families in South Goa are now seeking bus connectivity so that the youth can go out to nearby towns for jobs.

This hamlet - Marle - bordering Cotigao Wildlife Sanctuary is part of Poinguinim village panchayat in Canacona taluka of South Goa.

The villagers were unanimous in boycotting the 2019 Lok Sabha elections to press for their demand for a road.

Due to their pressure, BJP government in the state finally built a road before the 2022 assembly polls.

Another villager, Pandurang Gaonkar recalls how the "democratic way of protest in the form of boycott" helped villagers to get their demands fulfilled.

"We have a right not to vote. We appealed to all the villagers not to go to the polling station," he said.

"The issue was only about a 300-metre stretch of a road that was passing through Cotigao forest area. After we boycotted, the government constructed the road for us before 2022 Goa assembly polls," he said.

The locals say their demand for a bus was a legitimate one as they have to travel almost seven kilometres to reach the bus station. "There are job opportunities available in the nearby towns, but our youth cannot go there due to the lack of public transport system," Gaonkar said. —*PTI*

Haryana MP quits BJP, joins Cong

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge addresses the media with MP Brijendra Singh as the latter joins party **PHOTO: PTI**

CHANDIGARH/NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

- Birender Singh had served an ultimatum to BJP, virtually threatening to quit if the party continued its alliance with JJP

Ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, BJP MP from Hisar, Brijendra Singh on Sunday resigned from the party's primary membership due to "compelling political reasons" and joined Congress.

Soon after announcing his resignation on X, Brijendra Singh, the son of BJP leader Birender Singh, reached Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge's residence in New Delhi and joined the Opposition party.

Senior Congress leaders Ajay Maken, Mukul Wasnik, and Deepak Babaria were also present on the occasion.

In his post on X, Brijendra Singh said, "I have resigned from the primary membership of BJP due to compelling political reasons. I extend gratitude to the party, National President Sh. J P Nadda, Prime Minister Sh. Narendra Modi, & Sh Amit Shah for allowing me to serve as the Member of Parliament for Hisar."

Congress sources said the bureaucrat-turned-politician is set to be the party candidate from Hisar. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, Brijendra Singh defeated JJP's Dushyant Chautala and Bhavya Bishnoi, who was then with Congress, to win Hisar Lok Sabha seat. Brijendra Singh is the great-grandson of prominent Jat leader Sir Chhotu Ram. In October last year, Birender Singh had served an ultimatum to BJP, virtually threatening to quit if the party continued its alliance with JJP, which he accused of indulging in rampant corruption, in Haryana. JJP had extended support to BJP after the former fell short of the majority in the 2019 Haryana assembly polls. —*PTI*

LAUNDERING CASE: ED ARRESTS LALU'S AIDE

PATNA, 10 MARCH

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Subhash Yadav, who is allegedly a close aide of former chief minister Lalu Prasad Yadav and RJD. The arrest was made in Patna as part of a money laundering probe related to alleged illegal sand mining in the state.

Searches at half a dozen premises of Yadav and his associates were launched in the state capital on Saturday by the central agency as part of the ongoing probe.

Yadav was arrested late on Saturday night and about Rs 2.3 crore cash was seized from the various premises that were raided, the sources said.

Alleged to be the "key syndicate member" of the sand mining racket, Yadav is expected to be produced before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Patna on Monday.He had contested elections on an RJD ticket in the past, the sources said.

The money laundering case stems from a clutch of 20 FIRs registered by Bihar. Police against a company called Broadsons Commodities Pvt. Ltd. (BCPL) and its directors, alleging that they were engaged in illegal mining and sale of sand without using e-challans.

The alleged sand trade is controlled by a syndicate that invested funds in the said company and the syndicate earns profit by illegally selling sand, which is nothing but proceeds of crime, according to ED.

ED has claimed that proceeds of crime to the tune of Rs 161 crore were generated in this case. —*PTI*

'Election commissioners likely to be appointed by 15 March'

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Arun Goel **PHOTO: PTI**

Two election commissioners are likely to be appointed by 15 March to fill the vacancies created by the retirement of Anup Chandra Pandey and the surprise resignation of Arun Goel, sources said on Sunday.

Days before the poll panel is expected to announce the schedule for the Lok Sabha polls, Goel resigned on Friday morning. His resignation was accepted by President Droupadi Murmu on Saturday and the Law Ministry issued a notification to announce it.

This leaves Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar as the sole member of the poll authority.

A search committee under Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal and comprising the Home Secretary and the Department of Personnel and Training Secretary will first prepare two separate panels of five names each for the two posts.

Later, a selection committee headed by Prime Minister and comprising a Union Minister and Leader of Congress party in Lok Sabha Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury will then name two persons for appointment as election commissioners.

The election commissioners will be appointed by the President. Sources said the selection committee could meet either on 13 or 14 March depending on the convenience of the members and the appointments are likely to be made by 15 March. —*PTI*

Electoral bonds: SC to hear SBI's plea today

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Supreme Court will on Monday hear the application filed by the State Bank of India (SBI) seeking an extension till 30 June to disclose details of each electoral bond encashed by political parties before the scheme was scrapped last month.

A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud will also hear a separate plea, which has sought initiation of contempt action against the SBI alleging, it "wilfully and deliberately" disobeyed the apex court's direction to submit details of the contributions made to political parties through electoral bonds to the Election Commission by 6 March.The apex court bench, also comprising justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala, and Manoj Misra, will assemble at 10.30 am to hear the two petitions.

In a landmark verdict delivered on 15 February, a five-judge constitution bench scrapped the Centre's electoral bonds scheme that allowed anonymous political funding, calling it "unconstitutional" and ordered disclosure by the Election Commission of the donors, the amount donated by them, and the recipients by 13 March.

On 4 March, SBI moved the apex court seeking an extension till 30 June to disclose the details of the electoral bonds encashed by political parties.SBI contended that retrieval of information from "each silo" and the procedure of matching the information of one silo to that of the other would be a time-consuming exercise.The plea said electoral bonds are "completely traceable" which is evident from the fact that SBI maintains a secret number-based record of donors who buy bonds and the political parties they donate to.The contempt plea said any form of anonymity in the finances of political parties goes against the people's right. —*PTI*

LOK SABHA POLLS

BJP making ambitious bid to overcome challenges in Kerala

T'PURAM, 10 MARCH

BJP is increasing its efforts to break its electoral dry spell in Kerala as the state braces for the upcoming LS elections **PHOTO: PTI**

- The party's campaign slogan, 'Modi's guarantee', underscores its reliance on the Prime Minister's popularity and leadership

BJP is intensifying its efforts to break its electoral dry spell in Kerala as the state braces for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections.

With a concerted focus on outreach, particularly towards the minority Christian community, the party aims to secure a foothold in the southern state.

Kerala's demographic landscape, with Muslims and Christians constituting a significant portion of the population, presents a formidable challenge for the BJP, perceived as a pro-Hindu party.

However, the party is leaving no stone unturned in its bid to appeal to diverse voter segments.

In a strategic move, BJP has welcomed prominent Christian figures like Anil K Antony, son of Congress stalwart AK Antony, and seasoned Kerala politician PC George, into its fold.

Additionally, the party is leveraging Prime Minister Narendra Modi's frequent visits to Kerala, emphasising developmental agendas tailored to the state's needs.

To bolster its electoral prospects, BJP has strategically fielded two Union Ministers, Rajeev Chandrasekhar and V Muraleedharan, alongside popular actor-turned-politician Suresh Gopi.

The party's campaign slogan, 'Modi's guarantee', underscores its reliance on the Prime Minister's popularity and leadership.

'Modi's guarantee' will be the main catchphrase of the BJP's electoral campaign this time in Kerala, party leaders said.

While the BJP is confident that its strategy will play out as planned, the two major traditional players in the state politics-- Congress-led UDF and CPI (M)-led LDF believe that it will not help the saffron party secure even a single seat.

Disregarding the criticism and doubts raised by the Left front and the Congress, BJP's state general secretary George Kurien said that the people of Kerala no longer have any trust in either of them which is why they will vote for the saffron party. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Six of family from Bihar killed in road accident in Jaunpur

JAUNPUR , 10 MARCH

In an accident, six members of a family from Bihar died when their car was hit by a speeding truck here in the early hours of Sunday, police said. Superintendent of Police (SP) Ajay Pal Sharma said the car was headed for Prayagraj when the accident occurred on the Karjag-Kerakat road in the Gaura Badshahpur police station area around 2.30am. Three other members of the family are undergoing treatment in Varanasi, police said. The deceased have been identified as Gajdhar Sharma,60; and his son Anish Sharma,35, Jawahar Sharma,57, and his 17-year-old son, Sonam,34, and Rinku,32, all residents of Bihar's Sitamarhi district. Police have launched an investigation into the matter, the SP said.—*PTI*

Man kills brother for turning off music at family function

SATNA, 10 MARCH

A man allegedly hacked his brother to death with an axe after the latter turned off the music and stopped him from dancing at a family function in Madhya Pradesh's Satna district, police said on Sunday. The police have arrested the accused, Rajkumar Kol,30, for the murder that occurred at Mauhar village under Kothi police station limits on Friday night, an official said. Rajkumar's brother Rakesh,35, had organised a function at his house, during which music was being played on a sound system, said Rupendra Rajput, in-charge of Kothi police station. The victim later turned off the music, and the accused wanted to continue dancing, he said. An argument ensued between the brothers, and in a fit of anger, Rajkumar allegedly attacked Rakesh with an axe and killed him on the spot, the official said. —*PTI*

Terror hideout busted in Poonch, 7 IEDs seized

JAMMU, 10 MARCH

Security forces on Sunday busted a terror hideout in a forest in Jammu and Kashmir's Poonch district and seized seven rusted improvised explosive devices and a wireless set, officials said. They said the hideout located inside a cave was uncovered during a joint search operation by police and the Army at Dara Sangla in the Surankote area. Blankets and some other materials were also found in the hideout, the officials said. A case has been registered and further investigation is on, they said, adding that no arrests have been made so far.The officials said preliminary investigation suggests the hideout was used by terrorists active in the area two decades ago.—*PTI*

Woman raped, murdered in Assam; accused nabbed

GUWAHATI, 10 MARCH

A 28-year-old woman was allegedly raped and killed by two people in Darrang district of Assam, police said on Sunday. Darrang Superintendent of Police Prakash Sonowal told PTI that the woman, who works as a daily wager at a brick kiln in Naodinga village went missing on 7 March. "The police were intimated and an investigation was initiated accordingly. The body of the woman was found inside the smoke channel of the kiln on the next day," he added. After preliminary investigation, it was found that two people allegedly raped her and then dumped her body after murdering her, Sonowal said. "The two accused and are arrested," he added.—*PTI*

Anxiety drug Pregabalin linked to rising deaths

In 2018, there were 187 deaths linked to pregabalin in England and Wales

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

An analysis of pregabalin deaths in England between 2004-2020 has shown that in over 90 per cent of deaths, the presence of other opioids were detected *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

There has been a significant rise in deaths linked to the commonly prescribed anxiety drug, pregabalin. While in 2018 there were 187 deaths linked to pregabalin in England and Wales, this number was more than double in 2022 – with 441 deaths linked to the drug. Recent press reports have framed these deaths as signalling a "US-style opioid epidemic" caused by a medicine that "destroys lives".

This is not an equitable comparison, given hundreds of thousands of Americans have died due to opioids. These reports may only serve to cause undue panic about the drug, especially among those who have been prescribed it.

Pregabalin (also known by the brand names Lyrica and Alzain) is used to treat a variety of health conditions, including epilepsy, nerve pain and anxiety. The drug was first approved for use in Europe and the US in 2004. Pregabalin has rewarding properties, and can produce feelings of euphoria, calmness and relaxation. Pregabalin on its own is typically not dangerous, although as with all medication there are potential side effects – including confusion and headaches. It can also carry the risk of dependence, especially if taken long term. But where pregabalin can become dangerous, whether used as prescribed or not, is if it's taken alongside other drugs that it interacts negatively with.

Pregabalin should ideally be avoided alongside other opioids, certain sleep aids, benzodiazepines (another class of anxiety drug), muscle relaxants and even certain diabetes and epilepsy drugs. Most fatalities attributed to pregabalin are due to interactions with other drugs, leading to a suppression of breathing.An analysis of pregabalin deaths in England between 2004-2020 has shown that in over 90% of deaths, the presence of other opioids (including methadone or morphine) was detected.

However, in only a quarter of cases were these opioids actually prescribed to the person. This suggests that people were probably sourcing these drugs through illicit means and not through their doctor. Likewise, it's not clear from the data whether pregabalin had been prescribed, or if the person sourced it without a prescription. Although this data only goes up to 2020, it's likely that the picture is similar for the recent deaths linked to pregablin.

Fatalities

The recent rise in pregablin deaths partly coincides with an increase in the number of people prescribed the drug. In the UK alone, there were 8.4 million prescriptions for pregabalin in 2022.

This is up from 5.5 million in 2016.

Prescribers should also regularly review pregabalin prescriptions to ensure that patients are still benefiting from it. If not, recommending other treatments – such as psychological therapies, if a person is taking the drug for anxiety – might be more suitable. But in light of the profile of drugs involved in deaths previously

Certain groups may be at greater risk of harm from pregabalin. For example, people with a history of substance use disorder have a high level of co-occurring mental health problems, and may be prescribed pregabalin as a short-term treatment for anxiety.

- Recent rise in pregablin deaths partly coincides with an increase in the number of people prescribed the drug. In the UK alone

But because mental health and drug treatment support are typically provided by different services, a lack of communication between these services can sometimes mean that one service is not always fully aware of what drugs the other is prescribing – potentially leading to harmful drug interactions

Evidence also suggests that illicit pregabalin use is a growing problem in both Europe and North America. Its availability as a street drug may mean users aren't aware of the risks of taking pregabalin alongside other drugs – such as the synthetic opiate, methadone.

There's the added complication of fear of negative consequences. Someone prescribed pregabalin who uses illicit drugs may not declare this to their doctor. People who use illicit opioids less frequently (to self-treat pain or mental health problems) are also at elevated risk. —*PTI*

KIREN RIJIJU SAYS

The mission entails undertaking a crewed expedition to reach depth of 6,000 metres to the ocean bed in the Indian Ocean *PHOTO: X*

'Samudrayaan to explore ocean beds by 2025'

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

India should be able to send its scientists to study the deep ocean 6km under the sea surface in its own Samudrayaan by the end of next year, Earth Sciences Minister Kiren Rijiju has said.

In a video interview to PTI, Rijiju said India's deep-ocean submersible Matsya6000, which will take humans up to a depth of 6,000 meters under the sea, was "well on course" and could be tested by the "end of this year".

"But broadly I feel confident that by the end of 2025, that means next year, we should be able to send our human crew to the deep ocean, more than 6,000 meters deep," Rijiju said.

Samudrayaan, or the deep ocean mission, was initiated in 2021. The mission entails undertaking a crewed expedition to reach a depth of 6,000 metres to the ocean bed in the central Indian Ocean using Matsya6000, designed to accommodate a crew of three members.

The submersible will be equipped with a suite of scientific sensors and tools, and have an operational endurance of 12 hours, which is extendable up to 96 hours in the event of an emergency.

So far, countries such as the US, Russia, China, France and Japan have carried out successful deep-ocean crewed missions.

India is poised to join the ranks of these nations by demonstrating expertise of and capability for such missions. —*PTI*

ALL-WOMEN BIKE RALLY

Participants during the NBT All-Women Bike Rally, in New Delhi, on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

1993 blasts: HC relief for excise officials

NAGPUR, 7 MARCH

The Bombay High Court has granted relief to two retired Central Excise officials, nearly 20 years after disciplinary action orders against them for allegedly allowing landing of explosives used in the 1993 serial bomb blasts in the city.

There was no evidence to prove the charges against them in the departmental proceedings, a division bench of Chief Justice Devendra Kumar Upadhyaya and Justice Arif Doctor said while quashing the disciplinary action orders.

The duo, SM Padwal and Yashwant Lotale, retired superintendents of the Central Excise department, shall be entitled to all consequential benefits such as arrears of salary and pension, which shall be made available to them within two months, the High Court said in its judgment on 4 March.

Twelve bombs went off at different locations in Mumbai on 12 March, 1993, killing 257 people and injuring more than 700 others.

A special court later convicted 100 people in the case and acquitted 23 others.

The High Court noted that Padwal and Lotale did not face any criminal trial in the case.

Based on the alleged evidence available, the charges against them do not stand proved, it said.

"Our indefeasible conclusion is that it is a case where there was no evidence at all and accordingly, the conclusion arrived at by the disciplinary authority while passing the punishment orders is erroneous," the High Court said.

The High Court said the only evidence available against them is the alleged confessional statements made by the accused people to the police during investigation. — *PTI*

MAN WHO FELL INTO BOREWELL IN DELHI DEAD

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

The body of a man who had fallen into a 40-foot-deep borewell at a Delhi Jal Board water treatment plant here was pulled out after a nearly 12-hour-long operation on Sunday, Water Minister Atishi said.

The man, aged around 30, is yet to be identified.

According to information, the deceased was a male aged around 30 years. How he fell inside the borewell – this will be investigated by the police. —*PTI*

NDRF deploys its first forest fire fighting teams

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) Director General Atul Karwal has said the force has trained and deployed the first contingent of its 150 responders who can undertake forest fire combat operations even as it has also sought the Union Home Ministry's permission to get them further skilled in the domain from a foreign country.

A parliamentary panel had in 2022 expressed its concern over forest fires not being officially a part of disasters tackled by the specialised national force.

"The forest fire fighting teams are trained now and we are equipping them. Three teams of 50 people each are now deployed with our first battalion based in Guwahati, 10th battalion located in Vijaywada and the battalion number 15 in Uttarakhand," Karwal told PTI during an interview.

"A fourth such team is under training currently and it will be designated as a reserve unit," he said.

Karwal said, "We are also coordinating and requesting the ministry of home affairs (MHA) to get them trained aboard, in countries which suffer from this disaster the most. We can learn from them how to tackle the forest fires effectively." National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) official said the force will undertake fire extinguishing operations, drawing the 'fire line' in the forest to contain the spiralling inferno and help in the rescue of the people, who are trapped in this disaster that can either be man-made or natural. Forest fires, a parliamentary panel had said, is a growing threat now.

The incidents of forest fires not only damage the forest resources but also damage the biodiversity, cause climate change, adversely impact tribal livelihood and lead to severe distress among flora and fauna the panel said. —*ANI*

AT MADAKKULAM

Fire breaks out in TN forest due to heat

MADURAI , 10 MARCH

A Forest fire broke out in the Madakkulam area of Madurai in Tamil Nadu, an official said.

According to the Forest official, a fire broke out at Madurai's Madakkulam Sri Kabaleeswari Amman Temple hill in the midnight hours of Saturday.

Five fire tenders and rescue departments reached the spot and doused the fire after seven hours of rigorous work, the official said.

An intense heat wave has been identified as the cause behind the forest fire, the official added.

The official further added that there were no casualties in the incident. —*ANI*

PHOTO: X

- An intense heat wave has been identified as the cause behind the forest fire

Probe into theft unveils murders in Kerala family

IDUKKI, 10 MARCH

The probe into a theft case has led the Kerala Police to two hitherto undiscovered murders, including that of a toddler, police here said on Sunday.

According to police, forensic experts have initiated the process to exhume one of the bodies from a rented accommodation at Kattappana near here today.

The cops stumbled upon the murders while investigating a routine case of theft in a local store in which they had arrested Ernakulam residents Nitheesh,31, and Idukki Vishnu, 27, on 2 March.

As part of the investigation, police went to Vishnu's house, where they found details about the murders of his father Vijayan and of his newborn nephew, officials said.

Police said that they realised things were not adding up as the family members revealed that Vijayan was missing for the last few months. According to the First Information Report (FIR) , Nitheesh allegedly bludgeoned Vijayan to death due to a past enmity. —*PTI*

50 fall ill after eating at Nagpur Shivratri event

NAGPUR, 10 MARCH

More than 50 people in Maharashtra's Nagpur district suffered from food poisoning after consuming snacks and other eatables while observing fast on the occasion of 'Mahashivratri', officials said on Sunday.

The victims belonged to Kamptee in the district and some areas of Nagpur city.

They had observed fast on the 'Mahashivratri' festival on Friday.

After consuming the 'farali' (meant for consumption during fast) snacks made of sago, potatoes and other items purchased from some shops and roadside stalls in Kamptee, several people complained of upset bowel movements, stomachache and vomiting, a police official said.In Ganesh Nagar area of the city, seven members of a family suffered from food poisoning after consuming 'jalebis' (sweets) and other eatables made from water chestnut flour on Friday, officials from Dhantoli police station said.A cloth trader from Nanga Putla fell ill after consuming 'prasad' from a religious place on Friday, they said.The affected people were admitted to different hospitals and most of them were discharged after treatment on Saturday, they said.Deputy Commissioner of Police (Zone-V) Niketan Kadam said the police have collected food samples from some shops in Kamptee and they would be sent to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) department for analysis. —*PTI*

'DARD SE HUMDARD TAK'

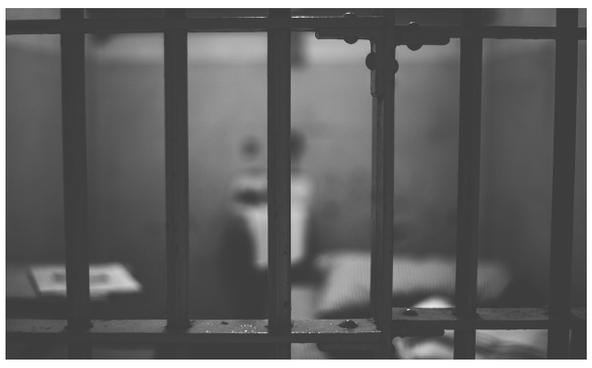
Lawyers provide free legal aid to needy

MUMBAI, 10 MARCH

Several undertrials, mostly from the poor strata of society, languishing in Maharashtra jails due to lack of proper legal assistance have found a ray of hope with a group of lawyers coming forward to take up their cases pro bono.

These lawyers, as part of NGO 'Dard se Humdard Tak', have helped the undertrials secure bail, arrange for their bail bond, and facilitated the release of those arrested in petty crimes cases such as robbery, mobile theft, etc after having spent considerable time in jail, advocate Prakash Salsingikar told PTI.

They visit jails across the state after having received permission from the state government and collect data of prisoners who need their services.



The organisation has come to the aid of more than 500 prisoners in the last three years *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

The organisation has come to the aid of more than 500 prisoners in the last three years, claimed Salsingikar who is working along with 20 other lawyers to provide such services.

Their organisation was registered as an NGO in May 2023, he said.

They meet the prisoners, study their case papers and provide assistance accordingly.

Salsingikar said majority of the undertrials fail to get proper legal assistance either due to non-awareness of remedies available to them under the law or because of their poor financial condition.

- These lawyers, as part of NGO 'Dard se Humdard Tak', have helped the undertrials secure bail, arrange for their bail bond, and facilitated the release of those arrested in petty crimes

A woman, who is mother of two daughters, spent more than four years in a jail here for allegedly killing her husband after being forced to conceive again.

She came across this organisation and with the help of its lawyer, secured bail from the Bombay High Court earlier this year.

"I did not get any help from outside until I came across this NGO. I am educated so I spent the time in jail doing office work but life for many others is very difficult," she said.

Fayal Sheikh, a daily wage labourer from Mankhurd in Mumbai, spent two years in jail after he was arrested for allegedly killing a man with whom he had an altercation with over urination.

His mother said they had lost all hope until lawyers from this organisation got in touch with them and fought his case.

Sheikh was granted bail in October last year by a sessions court which noted that the cause of the man's death was not injuries suffered in the altercation but due to pre-existing medical conditions. —*PTI*

TIBETANS PROTEST

Tibetans in exile take part in a protest marking the 65th anniversary of 'Tibetan National Uprising Day', at McLeodganj, near Dharamshala, Sunday
PHOTO: PTI

Opposition slams govt as election official quits

India's main Opposition party has accused the government of "systematic decimation of independent institutions" after the second-highest election commission official resigned days ahead of the expected announcement of the date of the general election.

Arun Goel's resignation as election commissioner on Saturday leaves Election Commission of India (ECI) with only one of its three mandated top officials in their posts to conduct the world's largest election with more than 960 million registered voters.

Ministry of Law and Justice said in a gazette notification that President Droupadi Murmu had accepted Goel's resignation, without citing a reason for his departure.

Goel, who took over as election commissioner in November 2022, has not yet made a public statement on his resignation. An election commission spokesman said he did not know why Goel had stepped down.

His tenure was till 5 December, 2027, and he would have become Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) after incumbent Rajiv Kumar's retirement in February next year.

Goel's resignation came within a month of Anup Pandey's retirement as the election commissioner, leaving CEC Rajiv Kumar alone in the three-member election panel.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is seeking a rare third straight term in office in the general election, due by May.

ECI now has only one of its three mandated top officials ahead of world's largest election ***PHOTO: PTI***

'Democracy usurped by dictatorship'

The main Opposition Congress party said Goel's resignation was a concern and demanded answers from Modi's government.

"Election Commission or Election OMISSION? India now has only one Election Commissioner, even as [general] elections are to be announced in a few days. Why? As I have said earlier, if we do not stop the systematic decimation of our independent institutions, our democracy shall be usurped by dictatorship," Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge posted on X.

"Since the new process of selecting the Election Commissioners has now effectively given all the power to the ruling party and the PM, why has the new Election Commissioner not appointed even after 23 days of the completion of latter's tenure? Modi government must answer these questions and come out with a reasonable explanation."

The election commission's decisions are taken by majority vote among three commissioners, each with a tenure of six years or up to the age of 65 years, according to its website.

Goel's resignation leaves the electoral body only with Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, after Anup Chandra Pandey retired as a commissioner last month.

It was not immediately clear if new commissioners could be appointed in time for the election. The appointment is conducted by a panel led by the Prime Minister, with the leader of the Opposition in the lower house of parliament and a federal minister nominated by the Prime Minister acting as its members.

India's constitution authorises the commission to run elections to parliament and state legislatures, as well as to the offices of the country's president and vice president.

A day after Election Commissioner Arun Goel resigned, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut claimed Election Commission of India is no longer an autonomous watchdog, but works as an extended branch of the ruling BJP.

"Whether ECI exists or not, it has no meaning especially after how it has given orders under BJP's pressure in the cases of Shiv Sena and NCP splits, completely in violation of the 10th schedule," Raut claimed.

"ECI is not the autonomous watchdog it used to be in the time of TN Seshan, but works as an extended branch of the BJP," Rajya Sabha member from Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena (UBT) further claimed.

The Opposition NCP faction led by Sharad Pawar said Goel's sudden resignation ahead of the Lok Sabha polls appeared suspicious.

"Did he resign because he had a doubt that elections would not be conducted in a free and fair manner? Did he voice it, therefore asked to leave? Government must answer," he said in a statement.

Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal said Goel's resignation suggested the government was putting pressure on the poll panel ahead of the vote.

"There is absolutely no transparency in how a constitutional institution like the ECI has been functioning and the manner in which the government pressurises them," he posted on X. *—Al Jazeera/PTI*

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

Rise in temperature poses risks to pregnant women

Temperature rise in India due to climate change poses serious health risks to pregnant women, including preterm delivery, gestational hypertension, and pre-eclampsia, according to a new government-backed study. Women and Child Development Minister Smriti Irani, speaking at the launch of the report that was sponsored by her department, said climate change and its impact are not a standalone crisis.

"This is the first Indian study from the perspective of agroecological zones in India; this has never been done in India before and that is why it is significant," she said.

"There has to be a narrative around the agroecological zones in the country.... India has to come up with legacy climate solutions that India has to offer and also study what the global north is facing in terms of climate change and how we can provide solutions," Irani said.

One significant finding of the study is the heightened vulnerability of pregnant women to the adverse effects of prolonged heat exposure.

With India projected to experience a rise in annual temperatures by 1.7 to 2.2 degrees Celsius by 2030, the number of individuals exposed to extreme heat conditions is on the rise. "This increase in temperature poses serious health risks to pregnant women, including preterm delivery, gestational hypertension, and pre-eclampsia," the study said.

The study was conducted by MS Swaminathan Research Foundation, Associated Chambers of Commerce & Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) and Karmannya.

This new study sheds light on the disproportionately higher risks faced by women and children, particularly concerning health outcomes and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Analysing various factors ranging from health risks to livelihoods, the report underscored the urgent need for targeted interventions to mitigate these effects.

Study sheds light on the disproportionately higher risks faced by women and children ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

It also emphasised the intersectionality of climate change and gender, highlighting how social and economic development play a crucial role in exacerbating vulnerabilities among women and children.

While acknowledging gender as a driver of vulnerability, the study found that most State Action Plans for Climate Change (SAPCC) in India inadequately address these gendered impacts.

It also called for promoting resilience-building initiatives for women, including infrastructure enhancement and livelihood diversification, as well as strengthening the capacity of female healthcare workers to respond to climate-related health emergencies.

Additionally, the study highlighted the urgency of taking concrete actions to protect the most vulnerable populations from the ravages of climate change. While the focus is on women and children, the study acknowledges the importance of addressing the needs of other vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and disabled, in climate resilience efforts.

Noting that the climate crisis presents profound gendered impacts, with women and children bearing a disproportionate burden of its consequences, the study said women are 14 times more likely than men to die in disasters, according to UNDP, and they often face higher risks and greater burdens due to their existing roles, responsibilities, and cultural norms, particularly in situations of poverty.

Children, too, are significantly affected by climate hazards, with their bodies and minds particularly vulnerable to climate-related impacts, the report said.

Agriculture, a critical livelihood source for women in rural India, is severely impacted by climate-driven crop yield reductions, exacerbating food insecurity and nutritional deficiencies, it said.

Addressing the multidimensional implications of climate change on women and children across different agro-ecological zones of India requires a differential and intersectional understanding, the study said.

This entails adopting a comprehensive approach to analyze the differential impacts on women and children's mental and physical health, food and nutrition security, and migration and work patterns, it said.

Likewise, empowering children and youth enables meaningful participation in developing equitable climate action, especially regarding decisions and actions that affect them. Overall, understanding and addressing the differential impacts of climate change on women and children is essential for achieving just and equitable climate outcomes," it said. *—PTI*

India projected to experience a rise in annual temperatures by 1.7 to 2.2 degrees Celsius by 2030 ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

'Inflection point': AI meme wars hit India election, test social platforms

On February 20, India's chief Opposition party, Indian National Congress (INC), uploaded a video parodying Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Instagram that has amassed over 1.5 million views.

It is a short clip from a new Hindi music album named "Chor" (thief), where Modi's digital likeness is grafted onto the lead singer. The song's lyrics were humorously reworked to describe a thief's – in this case, a business tycoon's – attempt to steal, and Modi handing over coal mines, ports, power lines and ultimately, the country.

The video isn't hyper realistic, but a pithy AI meme that uses Modi's voice and face clones, to drive home the nagging criticism of his close ties to Indian business moguls. That same day, the official BJP handle on Instagram, with over seven million followers, uploaded its own video. The one-minute clip is a super cut of Modi campaigning on the streets atop his car, spliced with real visuals of all the beneficiaries. What's unique is the background score: an old patriotic Hindi song sung by legendary singer Mahendra Kapoor, who passed away in 2008, recreated in an AI voice.

The lyrics were modified to highlight Modi's achievements over the past nine years, including helping farmers and enabling Indian scientists to land a rover on the moon. Audio forensic experts, who tested the clip upon Al Jazeera's request, confirmed that they are AI-generated.

While AI-enabled meme wars have been taking place over the past year, this is the first time both BJP and INC have created and shared AI-crafted political content on official party handles, without explicit disclosures.

Meta's current rules require advertisers to disclose when they use AI-edited political advertisements, but such provisions don't apply

Earlier this year, the independent Oversight Board that weighs in on significant content moderation decisions at Meta criticised the company's manipulated media policy and said it needs to be expanded to cover fake audio, and attach labels to misleading content. Meta subsequently in a blog post announced that it will label AI-generated images created using its own AI tools, and is working with industry partners on technical standards that will help identify and label AI audio and video created using other company's tools.

BJP and INC have created and shared AI-crafted political content on official party handles, without explicit disclosures ***PHOTO: X/@NILCHRISTOPHER***

Covert AI meme communications

In the Modi "Chor" video shared by INC on its @INCIndia Instagram handle, one could observe obvious discrepancies of deep fakes, such as a mismatch in lip-syncing, and a mild glitch in AI-Modi's face. The video, however, received a wave of laughter online, generating more than 1.6 million views. "Don't know about 2024 but clearly you guys have won the meme Fest!" commented historian Eshan Sharma.

Vaibhav Walia, chairman of the INC communications war room for the 2024 election, told that meme-based communication is more effective in terms of getting across the party's message on social media. One of the reasons for the use of AI is the need to create "standout content that can catch the eyes" of the voters, and keeping up with current social media trends, he said.

The two suspected AI clips, shared by BJP's official Instagram handle @BJP4India, were harder to discern as AI-created or not. Al Jazeera shared the two clips with two independent deep fake detection experts to test if they were AI-enhanced. The analysts were divided on the second video, where one judged the voice could be human "mimicry" of politicians. Both analysts unanimously agreed the singing voice in the first video was an AI voice.

Synthetically transform

The first video that recreated a 1970s Hindi song in the voice of singer Mahendra Kapoor was declared to be AI-generated by two experts.

Varshul Gupta, co-founder of India voice AI startup Dubverse.ai, told Al Jazeera the creators have used the retrieval-based voice conversion (RVC) model to synthetically transform a unique voice into Kapoor's voice. Since most of Kapoor's hit songs are from the early 70s, his voice would have been recorded in old equipment, using analogue mixing formats that aren't compatible to train a modern RVC model. To make an AI-generated version of Kapoor's voice, Gupta said, the creators are likely to have gathered high-quality voice data and "manually cleaned" it to get rid of the yesteryear blemishes in the audio, before training the AI model.

The second video features caricatures of opposition politicians including Mamata Banerjee and Shashi Tharoor, reciting poetry in their own voices. The video mocks the new INDIA alliance party formed by 28 opposition political parties to counter the BJP in the upcoming elections. While Lyu and his team's evaluation was that these voices were synthetically generated, Dubverse's Gupta said that it could be mimicry.

On 24 February, the All-India Anna Dravidian Progressive Federation (AIADMK) party's official X handle posted a minute-long audio clip of J Jayalalithaa, the iconic starlet of Tamil politics who has been dead since 2016. She was resurrected using AI by her party's digital media wing, to seek support for her successor contesting the upcoming 2024 elections.

Need for mandatory disclosures

Political organisations leveraging social media and influencers aren't new, but based on these new examples, the use of AI-enhanced memes and videos marks a unique moment in party-people communications.

As more instances of subtle AI touches or enhancements get shared on official political handles, experts said that platforms should enforce mandatory disclosure of AI-edited content for political pages.

AI humour isn't always welcome

While political parties are getting by without disclosing the use of AI, a few Indian citizens using AI to parody the powerful have not been as lucky.

In January, a youth was arrested by police in the state of Tamil Nadu for sharing a satirical AI video on Twitter, now X. The 87-second video, reviewed by Al Jazeera, is a satirical poem reimagined in the voice of an influential local poet, Vairamuthu, humorously criticising the former chief minister of Tamil Nadu for financial corruption and dynastic politics.

The video was reposted multiple times and gained more than 19,500 views on X, the police complainant noted, and caused irreparable damage to the reputation and dignity of the poet and the politician.

Despite having a clear disclaimer that "voices are AI-generated and are not real", at the start of the video, the police arrested an individual connected to the case. Even as platforms and governments advocate for disclosures on AI uses, experts caution that deep fakes used to create political satire need to be protected.

While deep fakes complicate the line between satire and photorealistic or audio realistic, we have witnessed global instances such as Brazilian deep fake satirist Bruno Sartori, who makes lifelike but clearly implausible pastiches of key political figures in Brazil from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva to former President Jair Bolsonaro.

Gregory points out that satirical speech is also often pseudonymous, as witnessed in the case of a popular Instagram account that shares AI-generated images of British politicians performing menial jobs or as refugees.

—Al Jazeera

9 dead, 78 sick after eating sea turtle in Zanzibar

ZANZIBAR, 10 MARCH

Eight children and an adult died and 78 other people were hospitalised after eating sea turtle meat on Pemba Island in the Zanzibar archipelago, authorities said Saturday. Sea turtle meat is considered a delicacy by Zanzibar's people even though it periodically results in deaths from chelonitoxism, a type of food poisoning. The adult who died late Friday was the mother of one of the children who succumbed earlier, said the Mkoani District medical officer, Dr Haji Bakari. He said the turtle meat was consumed Tuesday. Bakari told The Associated Press that laboratory tests had confirmed all the victims had eaten sea turtle meat. Authorities in Zanzibar, which is a semi-autonomous region of the East African nation of Tanzania, sent a disaster management team led by Hamza Hassan Juma, who urged people to avoid consuming sea turtles. In November 2021, seven people, including a 3-year-old, died on Pemba after eating turtle meat, while three others were hospitalised. *—AP*

Russian student jailed for pro Ukraine wi-fi name

KIYV, 10 MARCH

A student has been sentenced to 10 days in jail in Moscow after renaming his wi-fi network with a pro-Kyiv slogan. The Moscow State University student had titled the network "Slava Ukraini!" which means "Glory to Ukraine!". A Moscow court found him guilty of displaying "symbols of extremist organisations" on Thursday. Since the start of Russia's war in Ukraine, thousands have been handed prison terms or fines for criticising the invasion or supporting Ukraine. The student was arrested on Wednesday morning in Moscow, after a police officer had reported the network name to authorities. According to court documents, officers inspected his room within the university's student accommodation, and found his personal computer and a wi-fi router. The court said he had used the network to "promote the slogan 'Slava Ukraini!' to an unlimited number of users within wi-fi range." *—AP*

Deadly blast in Pakistan's Peshawar kills at least 2

PESHAWAR, 10 MARCH

At least two people have been killed in a motorcycle blast in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar, according to police officials. The blast near the Board Bazaar area of the city also wounded one person who has been admitted to Lady Reading Hospital. He is believed to be in a critical condition. The motorcycle carried between 4 and 5kg (9 to 11lb) of explosives when it detonated in the city, said Kashif Abbasi, senior superintendent of police operations in Peshawar. The explosives detonated prematurely, Abbasi added. He did not say what was the intended target. *—Al Jazeera*

Lufthansa faces 2-day crew strike in Germany

BERLIN, 10 MARCH

Lufthansa's cabin crew union has called a fresh two-day strike across two of Germany's busiest airports, Frankfurt and Munich. Taking place on Tuesday and Wednesday, it is the latest in a series of strikes to affect the German airline. The union's announcement comes days after Lufthansa announced record profits for 2023. Lufthansa said around 1,00,000 travellers are likely to be affected. The strike will cover all departures out of Frankfurt airport on Tuesday and all flights out of Munich on Wednesday, from 04:00 (03:00 GMT) to 23:00 (22:00 GMT) local time, the union said. It will affect both Lufthansa and its short-distance, low-cost subsidiary, Cityline. The Independent Flight Attendants Organisation is calling for a 15% pay increase and a €3,000 ($3,280; £2,550) inflation compensation payment for its 18,000 members with Lufthansa and 1,000 members at Cityline. *—BBC News*

19 dead, 80K flee after floods hit Indonesia

At least 7missing as landslide hits Sumatra island

PADANG, 10 MAR

Torrential rains have triggered flash floods and a landslide on Indonesia's Sumatra island, killing at least 19 people and leaving seven others missing, officials said Sunday.

Tons of mud, rocks and uprooted trees rolled down a mountain late Friday, reaching a river that burst its banks and tore through mountainside villages in Pesisir Selatan district of West Sumatra province, said Doni Yusrizal, who heads the local disaster management agency.

Rescuers by Saturday pulled out seven bodies in the worst-hit village of Koto XI Tarusan, and recovered three others in two neighbouring villages, Yusrizal said. Rescuers retrieved six bodies in Pesisir Selatan and three more in the neighbouring district of Padang Pariaman, bringing the death toll to 19, the National Disaster Management Agency said on Sunday.

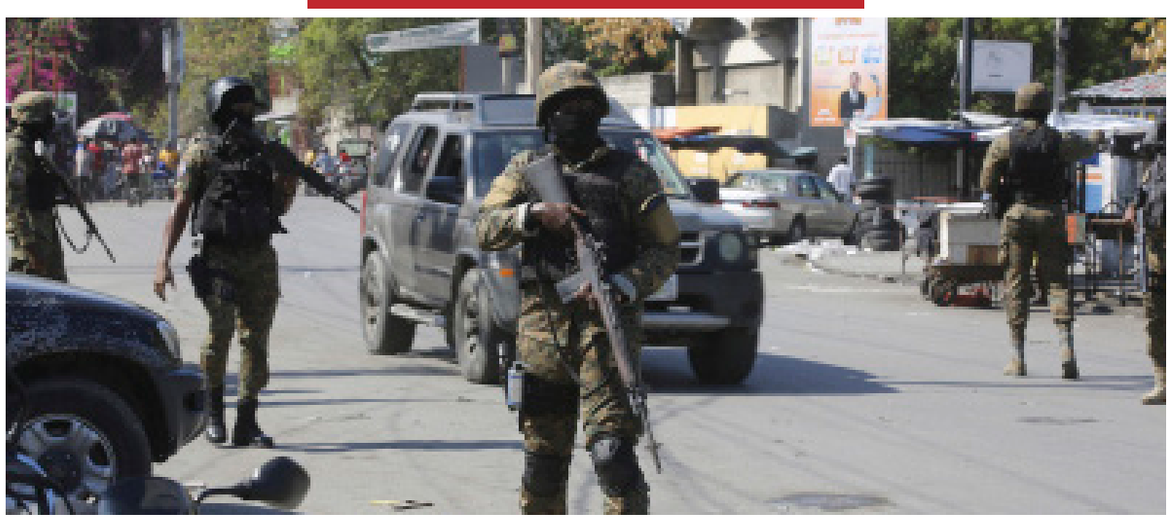
In this video grab, damaged houses are seen in a village affected by flash flood in Indonesia on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

The agency in a statement said at least two villagers were injured by the flash flood and rescuers are searching for seven people who are reportedly still missing. It said more than 80,000 people had fled to temporary government shelters after the flood and landslide buried 14 houses, while 20,000 houses were flooded up to the roof in nine districts and cities in West Sumatra province.

"Relief efforts for the dead and missing were hampered by power outages, blocked roads covered in thick mud and debris," Yusrizal said. Heavy rains cause frequent landslides and flash floods in Indonesia, where millions of people live in mountainous areas or near floodplains. In December, at least two people were killed when a landslide and floods swept away dozens of houses and destroyed a hotel near Lake Toba on Sumatra.

—AP

POLITICAL TURMOIL



Members of the General Security Unit of the National Palace, USGPN, set up a security perimeter around one of the three downtown stations after police fought off an attack by gangs the day before, in Port-au-Prince, Haiti on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Netanyahu hurting Israel by not stopping Gaza deaths, says Biden

WILMINGTON, 10 MARCH

US President Joe Biden said Saturday that he believes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is "hurting Israel more than helping Israel" in how he is approaching its war against Hamas in Gaza.

The US leader expressed support for Israel's right to pursue Hamas after the 7 October attack, but said of Netanyahu that "he must pay more attention to the innocent lives being lost as a consequence of the actions taken." Biden has for months warned that Israel risks losing international support over mounting civilian casualties in Gaza, and the latest remarks in an interview with MSNBC's Jonathan Capehart pointed to the increasingly strained relationship between the two leaders.

Biden said of the death toll in Gaza, "it's contrary to what Israel stands for. And I think it's a big mistake." Biden said a potential Israeli invasion of the Gaza city of Rafah, where more than 1.3 million Palestinians are sheltering, is "a red line" for him, but said he would not cut off weapons like the Iron Dome missile interceptors which protect the Israeli civilian populace from rocket attacks in the region.

US President Joe Biden said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is hurting Israel more than helping Israel *PHOTO: ANI*

"It is a red line," he said, when asked about Rafah, "but I'm never going to leave Israel. The defence of Israel is still critical, so there's no red line I'm going to cut off all weapons so they don't have the Iron Dome to protect them."

Biden said he was willing to make his case directly to the Israeli Knesset, its parliament, including by making another trip to the country. *—AP*

Sweden resumes UNRWA aid

GAZA, 10 MARCH

Sweden has said it is resuming aid to the cash-strapped United Nations agency for Palestinians with an initial disbursement of $20m after receiving assurances of extra checks on its spending and personnel. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East, faced an unprecedented funding crisis after its major international donors led by the US cut its funding over "terror" allegations. Also A ship carrying needed humanitarian aid is expected to set sail this weekend. *—BBC News*

Thousands call for Gaza ceasefire in London

LONDON, 10 MARCH

Tens of thousands of people have marched in central London calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The demonstration, organised by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC), made its way from Hyde Park Corner to the US Embassy in Nine Elms. It was the 10th pro-Palestinian march in central London since Israel started its campaign in Gaza following the 7 October attacks on Israel by Hamas. Singer Charlotte Church was seen at the front of the march as it set off. The Welsh singer, who has been a vocal campaigner, said she had joined to "show solidarity" with Palestinians "for all that they are suffering through". During the course of the event, Metropolitan Police officers arrested four people on suspicion of public order offences, including for chanting offensive slogans or holding an offensive placard, while one man was arrested for assault. *—BBC News*

'CHOICE OF HISTORY'

Newly elected Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, who is husband of slain prime minister Benazir Bhutto, was congratulated by Chinese Premiere Xi Jinping *PHOTO: PTI*

Xi greets Zardari, hails China-Pak friendship

BEIJING, 10 MARCH

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Sunday congratulated Asif Ali Zardari on his election as the Pakistan President, saying that the "iron-clad" friendship between the two countries is a "choice of history" and the strategic significance of their ties has become more prominent considering the current changes in the world.

Zardari, the husband of late Pakistan prime minister, Benazir Bhutto was overwhelmingly elected as the 14th President of Pakistan on Saturday, becoming the only civilian president of the country for a second time.

Zardari, the co-chairperson of the Pakistan Peoples Party, was the joint candidate of the ruling alliance of the PPP and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. In his message to Zardari, Xi said "China and Pakistan are good neighbours, good friends, good partners and good brothers, adding that the two countries' iron-clad friendship is a choice of history and a precious treasure of the two peoples."

Xi said that "the two countries have in recent years maintained close high-level exchanges, supported each other on issues concerning their respective core interests and major concerns, achieved fruitful results in the construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and maintained a high level of development of bilateral relations," state-run Xinhua news agency reported. India has objected to China over the USD 60 billion CPEC connecting China's Xinjiang with Gwadar port in Balochistan as it is being laid through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

Xi in his message said that as the world is confronted with accelerated changes unseen in a century, the strategic significance of China-Pakistan relations has become more prominent. Xi said he highly regards the development of China-Pakistan relations, and is ready to work with President Zardari to carry forward the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan, advance practical cooperation in various fields, push for greater development of China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, accelerate the building of an even closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, to better benefit the two peoples. Earlier, Xi greeted Shehbaz Sharif on being elected as Pakistan's Prime Minister. *—PTI*

Female representation remains low in US houses

In 10 states, women make up less than 25 per cent of their state legislatures *PHOTO: X/ USHOUSE*

CHARLESTON, 10 MARCH

Democrat Kayla Young and Republican Patricia Rucker frequently clash on abortion rights and just about everything else in West Virginia's Legislature, but they agree on one thing: Too few of their colleagues are women, and it's hurting the state.

"There are exceptions to every single rule, but I think in general, men do kind of see this as their field," said Rucker, part of the GOP's Senate supermajority that passed one of the nation's strictest abortion bans while Young — the lone Democratic woman elected to the House — opposed it.

Nearly 130 years since the first three women were elected to state legislative offices in the US, women remain massively underrepresented in state legislatures.

In 10 states, women make up less than 25 per cent of their state legislatures, according to Rutgers' Center for American Women in Politics.

West Virginia is at the very bottom of that list, having just 16 women in its 134-member Legislature, or just under 12 per cent.

That's compared with Nevada, where women occupy just over 60 per cent of state legislative seats. Similar low numbers can be found in the nearby southern states of Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee and Louisiana. *—AP*

Biden, Trump hold competing rallies in Georgia

GEORGIA, 10 MARCH

Donald Trump and Joe Biden have both held campaign rallies in the US state of Georgia, as their general election showdown comes into greater focus. The former president, 77, slammed Thursday's State of the Union speech as an "angry, dark and hate-filled rant". An hour later, President Biden, 81, unveiled new endorsements as he went on the offence against his rival. Both men are now within striking distance of clinching their respective party nominations for president. Trump has so far amassed 1,076 delegates and is 139 away from the number needed to lock in the Republican nod. Biden has collected 1,859 delegates, 109 short of what he needs to secure the Democratic ticket. *—BBC News*

Nepal PM 'Prachanda' to seek 3rd vote of confidence

KATHMANDU, 10 MARCH

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' is planning to seek a vote of confidence in Parliament by 13 March, days after he forged a new alliance with the CPN-UML.

The third round of vote of confidence comes after Prachanda, a former guerilla leader, dumped the Nepali Congress and forged a new alliance with the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) – the second-biggest party – led by former premier KP Sharma Oli on Monday.

According to constitutional provisions, prime ministers have to take a vote of confidence after any ally withdraws support. Prachanda informally discussed the matter within his close circle in the party on Saturday and the parliamentary party meeting of the CPN-Maoist Centre decided to issue a whip to all of its lawmakers to be present compulsorily in the Lower House during the voting on March 13, according to the party's secretary Ganesh Shah.

A formal decision to this effect will be taken during Sunday's Office Bearers' meeting of the party, he said. The lower House of Parliament - House of Representatives - has been summoned for a session on 13 March.According to Nepalese media, the new coalition has enough seats in the 275-member Parliament. After the change in power equation and withdrawal of support to the government by the Nepali Congress, the largest party in the Lower House, it has become mandatory for Prachanda to seek a vote of confidence within 30 days to prove his majority. *—PTI*

MALDIVES PURCHASES DRONES FROM TURKEY

MALE, 10 MARCH

- The Maldives government has not disclosed the details of the agreement so far

Maldives has for the first time acquired surveillance drones from Turkey for patrolling its vast exclusive economic zone, according to media reports on Sunday.

Efforts have begun by the state to establish a drone base in Noonu atoll Maafaru to operate the military drones brought from Turkey to conduct monitoring of Maldives' ocean territories, Editon. mv news portal reported. Turkey was the first foreign country visited by Mohamed Muizzu after he was sworn in as president in November. During his visit, he had seen the various military vehicles produced by the country and formed an agreement with a Turkish company to import military drones into his country, the report said. However, the Maldives government has not disclosed the details of the agreement so far. The surveillance drones from the Turkish company Baykar TB2 drones were delivered on 3 March, reports said. However, the Maldives government has not disclosed the details of the agreement so far. The surveillance drones from the Turkish company Baykar TB2 drones were delivered on 3 March , reports said. *—PTI*

300 STUDENTS KIDNAPPED

Mass abduction of Nigerian kids leave parents in shock

KURIGA, 10 MARCH

Rashidat Hamza is in despair. All but one of her six children are among the nearly 300 students abducted from their school in Nigeria's conflict-battered northwest.

More than two days after her children — ages 7 to 18 — went to school in remote Kuriga town only to be herded away by a band of gunmen, she was still in shock Saturday.

"We have never seen this kind of thing where our children were abducted from their school," she told an Associated Press team that arrived in the Kaduna State town to report on Thursday's attack. The kidnapping in Kuriga was only one of three mass kidnappings in northern Nigeria since late last week, a reminder of the security crisis plaguing Africa's most populous country. A group of gunmen abducted 15 children from a school in another north-western state, Sokoto, before dawn Saturday, and a few days earlier 200 people were kidnapped in north-eastern Borno State.

300 students were abducted from their school in Nigeria's conflict-battered northwest *PHOTO: PIXBAY*

It was in Borno's Chibok town a decade ago that school kidnappings in Nigeria burst into the headlines with the 2014 abduction of more than 200 schoolgirls by Islamic extremists, shocking the world.

No group claimed responsibility for any of the recent abductions. But Islamic extremists waging an insurgency in the northeast are suspected of carrying out the kidnapping in Borno. Locals blame the school kidnappings on herders who are in conflict with the settled communities.

Among the students abducted Thursday were at least 100 children aged 12 or younger. They were just settling into their classrooms at the government primary and secondary school when gunmen "came in dozens, riding on bikes and shooting sporadically," said Nura Ahmad, a teacher. "They surrounded the school and blocked all passages ... and roads" to prevent help from coming before marching the children away in an operation that lasted less than five minutes, Ahmad said.

Abdullahi Usman, 14, braved gunshots in making his escape from the captors. "Those who refused to move fast were either forced on the motorcycles or threatened by gunshots fired into the air," Abdullahi said. *—AP*

'Expect growth post investment by JSW Group'

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

MG Motor India expects an accelerated growth path with more aggressive expansion plans after getting the JSW Group as an investor, according to company CEO Emeritus Rajeev Chaba.With the company already establishing a well laid foundation based on technology, customer experience, gender diversity and community service in the first phase of its journey in the country, he said MG Motor India is now looking ahead to the next phase of growth."Now with the investor coming in, definitely I would expect an accelerated growth path, and more aggressive expansion plans." Chaba said.He was responding to a query on how MG Motor India was looking ahead with the new investor coming in but declined to share details on the future roadmap citing an impending announcement by the joint venture between China's SAIC Motor and JSW Group next week.—*PTI*

Signature to invest over ₹1.20cr/yr to boost housing works

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Realty firm Signature Global will invest Rs 1,000-1200 crore per year to purchase land for the development of housing projects and encash strong consumer demand, its Chairman Pradeep Aggarwal has said. In an interview with PTI, he highlighted that housing demand has been very strong in the past two years across all segments, be it affordable, mid-income, premium, luxury or super luxury.Aggarwal expects the demand momentum to sustain on better economic growth."We will be investing Rs 1,000-1200 crore every year for outright purchase of land to achieve our growth plan," Aggarwal said.Apart from outright land acquisition, he said the company would also be open to partnership with landlords for the development of housing projects. Recently, the company launched a new luxury housing project in Gurugram with an investment of Rs 2,200 crore. It has already sold the entire project, comprising 1,008 units for Rs 3,600 crore.The 16.5-acre project 'DE LUXE-DXP' is located at Sector 37D, Gurugram, on Dwarka Expressway. —*PTI*

Stone Sapphire to invest ₹1cr in homewares plant

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Toys and stationery manufacturer Stone Sapphire India will invest Rs 1,000 crore to set up a manufacturing facility for homewares like glassware, sippers, dinnerware etc, in Baroda..Stone Sapphire India Pvt. Ltd. (SSPL) Chairman Vick Rana said that homeware products available in India are either for the lower class or very high-end for the elite and leave a huge vacuum for middle-class consumers."Our work on new plant and capacity expansion has already begun in Baroda which is focused on the homeware segment. We are investing Rs.1000 crore on this expansion," Rana said. The Baroda plant will manufacture small kitchen appliances, metal cookware, and drinkware. —*PTI*

'Implement an inflation-based pricing model'

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Premium spirits and wine importers' body ISWAI has urged state governments to implement an inflation-based pricing model, highlighting that industry margins have shrunk due to a rise in raw material costs. As the cost of raw materials used to produce alcohol has gone up substantially and the MRP of liquor has not been revised in recent years, very little is left for the trade and manufacturers while state governments are taking away as high as 60-80 per cent of the share, according to International Spirits & Wines Association of India (ISWAI) CEO Nita Kapoor. —*PTI*

INDIA WON'T TAILOR POLICY FOR TESLA, SAYS GOYAL

Min said laws and tariff rules are designed to attract EV makers globally

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

India will not tailor its policies to suit US EV maker Tesla, and its laws and tariff rules will be formulated to attract all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up a base in the world's fastest-growing economy, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said.

Tesla has been seeking an initial tariff concession that would allow it to offset 70 per cent customs duty for cars priced less than USD 40,000, and 100 per cent for cars of higher value.

In an interview with PTI, Goyal said the government recognises the need for a vibrant EV ecosystem as greater use of battery-run vehicles will cut carbon emissions as well as the staggering oil import bill.

But for this, it will not tailor policies that suit any one company and would rather frame ones that will encourage all-electric vehicle manufacturers from across the world to set up shop in India, he said. Tesla made the concession demand a precondition to build a plant in India.

Minister Piyush Goyal was replying to a question about whether the government is looking at giving any concessions to Tesla for setting up a manufacturing unit in India **PHOTO: PTI**

"Government does not tailor policy for any one individual company or its interests. Everybody is free to make their demands. But that does not mean that the government will necessarily take a decision (based on) what you demand," he said.

Goyal was replying to a question about whether the government is looking at giving any concessions to Tesla for setting up a manufacturing facility in India.The Indian factory, as and when it happens, would be Tesla's sixth vehicle plant.

At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty ranging from 60 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value less or above USD 40,000.

Tesla's chief Elon Musk met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in June last year in New York. Musk, after meeting the Prime Minister, said he plans to visit India in 2024.

"We recognise that India must have a vibrant electric mobility ecosystem. We recognise that it has multifarious benefits to grow towards electric mobility. Not only will it help us in our fight against climate change, it will also improve the environment and lower pollution levels, particularly in cities, which largely suffer because of the ICE (internal combustion engine) or the petrol-diesel fumes that are thrown out," Goyal said.

The minister emphasised that the sector can be a powerful medium to make the country macro-economically even stronger. —*PTI*

- At present, cars imported as completely built units (CBUs) attract customs duty ranging from 60 per cent to 100 per cent, depending on engine size and cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value less or above USD 40,000

Mcap of 7 most valued firms climbs ₹71,301cr

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

The combined market valuation of seven of the top-10 most valued firms climbed Rs 71,301.34 crore in the holiday-shortened last week, with Bharti Airtel emerging as the lead gainer.

In a record-breaking rally last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 374.04 points or 0.50 per cent.

The 30-share BSE Sensex on Thursday settled at a new closing peak of 74,119.39. The Nifty also ended at a fresh closing high of 22,493.55.

Leading stock exchanges BSE and NSE conducted a special trading session in the equity and equity derivative segments on Saturday (March 2) to check their preparedness to handle major disruption or failure at the primary site.

While TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bharti Airtel, Hindustan Unilever and ITC were the gainers, Reliance Industries, Infosys and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) suffered erosion from their market valuation.The valuation of Bharti Airtel jumped Rs 38,726.67 crore to Rs 6,77,448.44 crore.

State Bank of India added Rs 13,476.16 crore, taking its market valuation to Rs 7,03,393.29 crore.HDFC Bank's valuation rallied Rs 12,243.35 crore to Rs 10,98,707.88 crore and that of ICICI Bank spurted by Rs 3,099.76 crore to Rs 7,63,581.30 crore.The market capitalisation (mcap) of ITC climbed Rs 1,469.81 crore to Rs 5,15,921.57 crore and that of TCS advanced by Rs 1,157.79 crore to Rs 14,87,070.15 crore.

The valuation of Hindustan Unilever climbed Rs 1,127.8 crore to Rs 5,68,753.81 crore.

However, the mcap of Infosys tanked Rs 15,875.81 crore to Rs 6,71,121.34 crore and that of Reliance Industries tumbled Rs 15,391.94 crore to Rs 20,01,358.50 crore. —*PTI*

FPIs inject over ₹6,100cr in equities in March

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) are turning steady buyers as they bought Indian equities worth ₹6,139 crore so far this month driven by strong economic growth, market resilience and decline in US bond yields.

This came following a modest investment of ₹1,539 crore in February and massive outflow of ₹25,743 crore in January, data with the depositories snowed.

"FPI inflows have shown a positive trend as compared to the previous month. Thanks to the recent announcement of Q3 GDP numbers at 8.4 per cent, persistence performance of large Indian corporates being major factors for turning the tide green for the Indian equity market," Manoj Purohit, Partner and leader - FS Tax, Tax and Regulatory Services, BDO India, said.

Announcements such as removal of UAE from the grey list, SEBI's consultation paper for easing disclosures norms for regulated FPIs have been the major catalysts to put India on the forefront for potential long term investments for the foreign fraternity, he added.

This came following an investment of Rs 1,539 crore in Feb **PHOTO: PTI**

Deepak Nitrite, Navin Fluorine, SRF, Tata Chemicals, etc — A health check on speciality chemicals

V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, attributed this renewed interest in Indian equities to three reasons -- resilience of Indian markets, steady drop in the US bond yields (the 10-year yield has declined from above 4.3 per cent to 4.08 per cent now) and strong GDP growth.

Apart from equities, FPIs have injected ₹1,025 crore in the debt market during the period under review. This came in the backdrop of Bloomberg announcing India's bonds inclusion in its Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Government Index and related indices from January 31 next year. —*PTI*

'REDUCE RISK IN INDIA'

RIL-Disney merger to boost firm's profits: CEO Bob Iger

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Walt Disney CEO Bob Iger has said a joint venture with Reliance Industries after merging its India business would benefit the company in terms of profit and also "derisk" its business in the Indian market.

The merger deal will create a big entity and help it to stay in the market at a "significant level", said Iger at a Morgan Stanley investor conference earlier this week.

"We had an opportunity to align with Reliance, which is obviously the company that has done very well there and one that we respect. And in doing so, end up owning part of a bigger media company. And we believe that, that not only should benefit us in terms of the bottom-line, but derisk us as well there," he said.

Last month, Walt Disney Co. and Reliance Industries announced signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India.

Under the deal, Reliance will hold 63.16 per cent and Disney will have 36.84 per cent in the JV, which will create India's leading media company that will house two streaming services and around 120 television channels.Iger said, the merger will help it to stay in the market at a "significant level".

Transaction values the joint venture at Rs 70,352 crore on a post-money basis, excluding synergies. Reliance has also agreed to invest at closing Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture. —*PTI*

Mobile phone manufacturing jumps 21 times in 10 yrs: ICEA

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Mobile phone manufacturing in value terms jumped 21-fold to Rs 4.1 lakh crore in India in the last 10 years as government policy measures like PLI played a critical role in attracting global players to boost local production, industry body ICEA said in a statement.

India now produces 97 per cent of its total mobile phone demand locally and 30 per cent of the total production in financial year 2024 is meant for export, the India Cellular and Electronics Association said.

"Mobile phone production surged from Rs 18,900 crore in 2014-15 to an estimated Rs 4,10,000 crore in FY'24, registering an increase of 2000 per cent. In 2014-15, mobile phone exports from India were a mere Rs 1,556 crore. The industry expects to end FY24 with an estimated export of Rs 1,20,000 crore. This would mean a 7500 per cent increase in exports over a decade," ICEA said.

PHOTO: PTI

According to a note on manufacturing Apple and Samsung, have played a crucial role in boosting mobile phone exports from the country.India manufactured devices are being exported in large volumes to the UK, Netherlands, Austria, and Italy. "30 per cent of production in FY'24 will now be meant for exports. The industry expects to end FY'24 with an estimated export of Rs 1.2 lakh crore. Driven by this export growth, mobile phones have now become India's 5th largest export as an individual commodity," the industry body said. —*PTI*

CBDT emails, assessees for mismatch in tax

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

The income tax department on Sunday said it has started sending emails and SMSs to assessees whose taxes paid during the current fiscal are not commensurate with financial transactions.

The department is undertaking an e-campaign, which aims to inform such persons/entities of significant financial transactions, through email (marked as Advance Tax e-Campaign-Significant Transactions for AY 2024-25) and SMS, urging them to compute their advance tax liability correctly and deposit the due advance tax on or before 15 March.

In a statement, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said the income tax department has received certain information on specific financial transactions undertaken by persons/entities during the Financial Year (FY) 2023-24.

This is another initiative of the department towards easing compliance for taxpayers and reinforcing its commitment towards enhancing taxpayer services, it added.To increase transparency this information is reflected in the Annual Information Statement (AIS) module and is available to persons/entities for viewing.

The value of 'significant transactions' in the AIS has been used for carrying out this analysis.

This is another initiative of the department towards easing compliance for taxpayers and reinforcing its commitment towards enhancing taxpayer services, it added. —*PTI*

ALASKA AIRLINES

Boeing can't find records on door mishap

SEATTLE, 10 MARCH

Boeing has acknowledged in a letter to Congress that it cannot find records for work done on a door panel that blew out on an Alaska Airlines flight over Oregon two months ago.

"We have looked extensively and have not found any such documentation,"-ZiadOjakli, Boeing Executive Vice President and Chief government lobbyist, wrote to Senator Maria Cantwell on Friday.

The letter, reported earlier by The Seattle Times, followed a contentious Senate committee hearing Wednesday in which Boeing and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) argued over whether the company had cooperated with investigators.

On 5 January, door plug of Boeing 737 Max 9 came off as the plane was climbing, opening a large hole on the side of plane **PHOTO: X**

The safety board's chair, Jennifer Homendy, testified that for two months Boeing repeatedly refused to identify employees who work on door panels on Boeing 737s and failed to provide documentation about a repair job that included removing and reinstalling the door panel.

Boeing has been under increasing scrutiny since the 5 January incident in which a panel that plugged a space left for an extra emergency door blew off an Alaska Airlines Max 9. Pilots were able to land safely, and there were no injuries.

In a preliminary report last month, NTSB said four bolts that help keep the door plug in place were missing after the panel was removed so workers could repair nearby damaged rivets last September.

The Federal Aviation Administration recently gave Boeing 90 days to say how it will respond to quality-control issues raised by the agency and a panel of industry and government experts.

The panel found problems in Boeing's safety culture despite improvements made after two Max 8 jets crashed in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. —*PTI*

Sun Pharma recalls 55,000 drug bottles

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Drug major Sun Pharma is recalling around 55,000 bottles of a generic medication to treat gout from the American market due to manufacturing practices norms deviations, according to the US health regulator.

The New Jersey-based unit of the Mumbai-based drug major is recalling Febuxostat Tablets in 40 mg and 80 mg strengths, US Food and Drug Administration (USFDA) said in its latest Enforcement Report.

Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Inc is recalling 47,520 bottles (40mg) and 7,488 bottles (80 mg) respectively of the medication due to Current Good Manufacturing Practice regulations (CGMP) deviations, it stated.

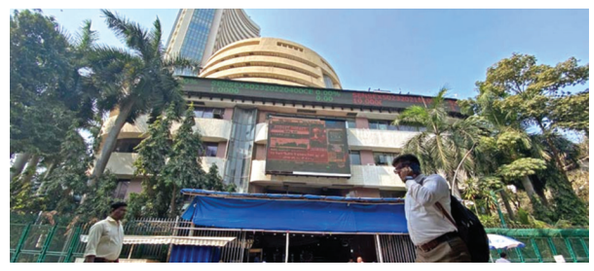
Febuxostat is used to lower uric acid levels in people with gout.

As per the USFDA, the company has initiated the Class II nationwide (US) recall on March 4 this year.

As per the USFDA, a class II recall is initiated in a situation in which the use of, or exposure to, a violative product may cause temporary or medically reversible adverse health consequences or where the probability of serious adverse health consequences is remote.

Sun Pharma is one of the leading generic pharmaceutical companies in the US. —*PTI*

ON HIGH VALUATIONS



In a record-breaking rally last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 374.04 points or 0.50 per cent **PHOTO: PTI**

Macroeconomic data to drive mkt trends this week

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

In a data-packed week, the domestic macroeconomic figures -- industrial production and inflation numbers -- along with global trends would dictate trends in the equity market this week, analysts said.

According to experts, markets may face volatile trends due to high valuations. Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit their fresh record peaks on Thursday.

Besides, trading activity of foreign investors, movement of global oil benchmark Brent crude and rupee-dollar trend would also influence trading in equities.

"This week's market focus shifts to inflation data releases. Both India and the US will unveil their Consumer Price Index (CPI) figures on Tuesday. On Thursday, WPI data will be announced.

"Large-cap stocks may continue their outperformance as Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) are expected to maintain their buying spree," Santosh Meena, Head of Research, Swastika Investmart Ltd, said.

Industrial Production data for January and inflation numbers for the month of February is scheduled to be announced on Tuesday.

WPI (Wholesale Price Index) inflation data will be announced on Thursday.

"Inflation data from the US, China, and India will provide investors with insights into the global macroeconomic outlook. We expect volatility to persist in this week due to high valuations and forthcoming policy rate guidance releases," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services.

In a record-breaking rally last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 374.04 points or 0.50 per cent.

Stock markets were closed on Friday for Mahashivratri.

"Apart from the scheduled macroeconomic data, the performance of the global indices would continue to offer cues over market direction. Currently, the US markets are seeing some profit-taking, after a steady uptrend for 4 months.

And, that might result in intermediate volatility in our markets too, especially at the open," Ajit Mishra, SVP- Technical Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said. —*PTI*

Indian Oil set to join high table of F1 fuel producers

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

After delivering back-to-back innovations in fuel grades, Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) has now set sight on the Grand Prix and will in next three months start producing fuel used in adrenaline-pumping Formula One or F1, motor racing.

The firm's refinery at Paradip in Odisha will in three months produce the petrol used in F1 car racing, its chairman ShrikantMadhav Vaidya said.Vaidya said the company expects to get its Formula 1 fuel certified in around three months, after which it will start competing with other global majors like Shell to supply it to the F1 teams.

IOC will supply fuel for all the motorcyclists from 15 countries that will participate in the FIM Asia Road Racing Championship. —*PTI*

India regain top spot in ICC Test Team Rankings

India are heading WTC standings and are now at the summit of ICC rankings in all 3 formats

DUBAI, 10 MARCH

A day after India crushed England in Dharamsala to win the five-match series 4-1, Rohit Sharma's side claimed the top spot in the ICC Test rankings, overtaking Australia in the latest pecking order released by the world governing body for cricket on Sunday.

India, who are already heading the World Test Championship (WTC) standings, are now at the summit of the ICC rankings in all three formats of the game.

Rohit's side will remain at the top of the chart irrespective of the result of the second Test between New Zealand and Australia currently underway in Christchurch.

Australia, the reigning World Test Championship winners are leading the two-Test series 1-0 following their 172-run victory in Wellington.

India, with 122 rating points, is five points ahead of Australia in the Test ranking, while England is third with 111 rating points.

In ODIs, India has 121 rating points, with Australia a close second with 118 points.

In the T20Is, India has 266 rating points, with England (256) at the second spot.

India was the world's No.1 Test side from September 2023 to January 2024, before they slipped to the second spot after a drawn-away series against South Africa.

Australia overtook India at the top of the Test rankings, after sweeping the three-Test series against Pakistan at home.

India's five-Test series against England saw them lose the first Test in Hyderabad by 28 runs. But the home team bounced back in style to win the remaining four Tests.

Victories in Visakhapatnam, Rajkot, Ranchi, and Dharamsala helped them reclaim the top position in the Test rankings. *—PTI*

Captain Rohit Sharma (L) joins his teammates for a group photo with the trophy **PHOTO: PTI**

TEST CRICKET IS HARD: DRAVID TO YOUNG PLAYERS

DHARAMSALA, 10 MARCH

Rahul Dravid underlined the importance of staying together and functioning as a unit to be triumphant in the tough world of Test cricket while delivering a motivational dressing room speech after India registered a memorable 4-1 series win over England. Test cricket is hard at times. It's hard in terms of your skill. It's hard physically, as you've seen, it's hard mentally," Dravid said in a video posted on BCCI.tv. The Indian coach was a chuffed man after some of those young names emerged with flying colors from the series. *—PTI*

DON'T THINK ROHIT'S CAPTAINCY WAS BETTER: SWANN

DHARAMSALA, 10 MARCH

Former England spinner Graeme Swann doesn't believe Rohit Sharma's captaincy was better than Ben Stokes' in the five-match Test series. Rather, it was a lethal set of bowlers that "did the trick" for the India skipper.While Stokes' leadership style has attracted all the attention before and during the series, Rohit's team emerged as 4-1 winners in the end."I don't think he has been superior as a captain because his bowlers have done the trick for him. I think he's got more weapons at his armory," Swann told PTI Videos. *—PTI*

RANJI TROPHY FINAL

Shardul shines for Mumbai, Vidarbha goes 3 down

MUMBAI, 10 MARCH

Seasoned duo Shreyas Iyer and Ajinkya Rahane's run drought continued but Shardul Thakur's all-rounder utility helped hosts Mumbai to claw their way back against a gutsy Vidarbha on the opening day of the Ranji Trophy final.

After scoring a counter-punching 75 off only 69 balls to give Mumbai's below-par first-innings score of 224, some semblance of respectability, Thakur also dismissed veteran opener Dhruv Shorey (0) with an angular delivery which got him a favorable DRS result.

Vidarbha were 31/3 at stumps with another 193 runs in arrears in the first innings with Atharva Taide (21 not out) and night-watchman Aditya Thakare at the crease.

Playing the last first-class game of his career, medium pacer Dhawal Kulkarni bowled his customary late outswingers which had Aman Mokhade (8) and Test triple centurion Karun Nair (0) nicking it to Hardik Tamore behind stumps.

Mumbai's top guns Rahane and Iyer were both dismissed for identical scores of 7 in a shocking collapse that saw the 41-time champions slipping from 81/0 to 111/6 on either side of the lunch break.

His achievement as a leader notwithstanding, Rahane's miserable run in the Ranji Trophy continued when the Mumbai skipper played one meekly to mid-on to be dismissed at a time when his team needed him to drop the anchor.

Around the same time last year, Rahane was a contender to earn his spot back in the national team but as things stand, irrespective of the outcome of this final it remains to be seen if Mumbai selectors would persist with the 35-year-old for the next season.

Out of favor and back in the grind to come back in the national reckoning again, Iyer once again failed to bail Mumbai out of trouble due to his poor technique.

During the morning session, Umesh Yadav (2/43 in 13.3 overs) was as wayward as one could be spraying the new ball all over and mostly drifting on the pads of openers Prithvi Shaw and Bhupen Lalwani.

Brief scores: Mumbai 224 in 64.3 overs (Prithvi Shaw 46, Bhupen Lalwani 37, Shardul Thakur 75; Umesh Yadav 2/43, Harsh Dubey 3/62, Yash Thakur 3/54) lead Vidarbha 31/3 in 13 overs (Atharva Taide 21*; Shardul Thakur 1/14, Dhawal Kulkarni 2/9) by 193 runs. *—PTI*

Shardul amps up batting before the IPL with a brisk fifty in the Ranji final. **PHOTO: PTI**

PHOTO: PTI

Djokovic wins in return to Indian Wells after 5-years

INDIAN WELLS, 10 MARCH

Novak Djokovic made a winning return to the desert, beating Aleksandar Vukic 6-2, 5-7, 6-3 on Saturday in his first match at the BNP Paribas Open in five years.The 24-time Grand Slam singles champion joined Rafael Nadal as the only player to win 400 matches in ATP Masters 1000 series events. The top-ranked Djokovic is a five-time champion at Indian Wells, tied with Roger Federer for most by a male, but hadn't played in the event since 2019.Coco Gauff and Aryna Sabalenka also won — barely — rallying to win their opening matches in third-set tiebreakers.Gauff edged Clara Burel 2-6, 6-3, 7-6 (4). The U.S. Open women's champion trailed 4-0 and then 5-2 in the third set, leaving her a game away from becoming the second top American upset by Burel this year. *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

Naomi Osaka knocks out No. 15 seed Liudmila

BUSTO ARSIZIO, 10 MARCH

Naomi Osaka said "I'm just enjoying my time a lot more" on the court and is "grateful to be back" as she continued her return to the circuit with victory at Indian Wells.The Japan player followed up her dominant opening-round win over Sara Errani with a tight 7-5 6-3 victory over world No. 15 Liudmila Samsonova to move into the last 32 in California. Speaking after the match, Osaka said she was hoping to "play a lot more matches" after taking a lengthy break to give birth to her daughter Shai."I'm just enjoying my time a lot more," she said. "And, overall, just really grateful to be back and being healthy and playing well. So, I just hope I can play a lot more matches.". *—AP*

Australia needs 202 runs and New Zealand 6 wickets

CHRISTCHURCH, 9 MARCH

Australia needed 202 runs and New Zealand six wickets to win the second cricket test in what should be a thrilling finish after both teams had highs and lows on the third day Sunday.

Rachin Ravindra made 82, Tom Latham 73, and Daryl Mitchell 58 before New Zealand was out for 372 in its second innings after trailing by 94 on the first. That left Australia needing 279 to win the match and complete a 2-0 sweep of the series. The target, if achieved, will be the 14th-highest successful fourth-innings run chase in test history.

At stumps, Australia was 77-4 with Mitch Marsh 27 not out and Travis Head 17. Head and Marsh batted through the last 10 overs of the day to save Australia from further loss.

Matt Henry and Ben Sears took two wickets each in the final session as New Zealand reduced Australia to 34-4 before it staged its late recovery.

New Zealand heads into the final day in a strong position to continue its streak of unbeaten test series at home. After the current pair, Australia has wicketkeeper Alex Carey to come, then captain Pat Cummins and the rest of the bowlers.

Australia had held a slight advantage at the end of the second day when New Zealand was 134-2 in its second innings, a lead of only 40.

New Zealand increased its lead through an absorbing day Sunday, through a partnership of 123 between Ravindra and Mitchell and with the help of Scott Kuggeleijn's 44 from 49 balls near the end.

Australia 256 and 77 for 4 (Head 17*, Marsh 27*) need 202 more runs to beat New Zealand 162 and 372 (Ravindra 82, Latham 73, Cummins 4-64, Lyon 3-49). *—AP*

Matt Henry trapped Steven Smith lbw **PHOTO: AFP**

Delhi Capitals players Jemimah Rodrigues and Radha celebrate the wicket of RCB's Sophie Molineux during the Women's Premier League **PHOTO: PTI**

DC pull off last-ball thriller

NEW DELHI, 10 MARCH

Delhi Capitals pulled off a thrilling 1-run win against Royal Challengers Bangalore in the crucial Women's Premier League 2024 match and secured a playoff qualification with a game in hand on Sunday.

A quick fifty from Jemimah Rodrigues and a crucial 48 from Alice Capsey boosted Delhi to 181/5 total batting first at New Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium. RCB struggled for the start but 51 runs off 29 balls from youngster Richa Ghosh took the game to the last ball.

Shafali Verma and Jess Jonassen combined to run out Richa on the last ball of the game when RCB needed just two runs to win the game.

A win boosted Meg Lanning-led Delhi to the top of the points table with five wins in seven games, on a level with defending champions Mumbai Indians. Bangalore and UP Warriorz chase the third and final playoff qualification spot with Gujarat Titans out of the race.

Spinner Asha Shobhana, seeing her coming down the track, tried to bowl one wide and out of her reach but the Southern Stars batter used her big reach to wallop her over extra cover. *—PTI*

Diksha tied for 6th place

FLORIDA, 9 MARCH

Diksha Dagar shot 2-under-70 in strong windy conditions to keep herself In the frame at the Aramco Team Series– Tampa Florida, USA.

Dagar is now 5-under for 36 holes and lying tied sixth, as she moved up from overnight T-16 at the Feather Sound Country Club.

India's other challenger Pranavi Urs, who was tied-fifth after the first round, slipped down the leaderboard with a 2-over. She Is now 2-under for 36 holes and T-22, down from T-5 after the first day.

Pranavi shot 67 on the first day and Diksha had a 69.

England's Charley Hull climbed to the top of the leaderboard after back-to-back rounds of 68 (-4). She is now 8-under for two rounds.

Alexandra Fosterling (70) of Germany and Spaniard Carlota Ciganda (71) at 7-under are tied for second. Ana Pelaez Trivino of Spain (70-68) was fourth.

Diksha said: "I had a good round. I'm very satisfied with it. And I have dropped two silly shorts, which were inside handouts but never mind. The last few holes were tougher because of the wind and I didn't lose grip."

"It was a very strong wind, like having to play three clubs extra or having to keep the ball low. So it becomes challenging to decide what club to hit." *—AP*

Diksha Dagar **PHOTO: PTI**

Satwik-Chirag win French Open doubles title

PARIS, 10 MARCH

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty continued their love affair with Paris, lifting the French Open badminton crown for the second time with a dominating straight-game win over Chinese Taipei's Lee Jhe-Huei and Yang Po-Hsuan in the men's doubles final here on Sunday.

The world No. 1 Indian pair had finished runners-up in the French Open in 2019 before winning the title in 2022. On Sunday, the Asian Games champions outwitted Lee and Yang 21-11 21-17 in 37 minutes to regain the Super 750 tournament title and also win their first crown of the season after reaching the summit clash for the third time in 2023. The Indian duo had finished second best at the Malaysia Super 1000, and India Super 750 this year, while signing off as runners-up at China Masters Super 750 as well last year. *—AP*

Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty **PHOTO: AFP**

OLYMPICS QUALIFICATION

Punia and Ravi were eliminated from the Paris

SONEPAT, 10 MARCH

Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya the Tokyo Games medallists were on Sunday eliminated from the race for the Paris Olympics qualification after losing their respective bouts in the selection trials for the national team.

Punia, who was a prominent face of protest against former WFI President Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, suffered a crushing 1-9 defeat in the men's freestyle 65kg semifinal against Rohit Kumar.

This was after he barely managed to win against Ravinder (3-3 on criteria) in the opening round.

If Ravinder had not conceded a caution point in the bout, Punia would have been eliminated in the opening bout itself.

Punia had trained in Russia to prepare for the trials, which are being organized by the IOA ad-hoc panel.

Punia though won a case in the Delhi High Court after contending that the suspended Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) had no authority to conduct trials. He left the Sports Authority of India (SAI) Centre here in a huff after being eliminated. The National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA) officials tried to collect a sample for a dope test from Punia but he did not stay back even for the third-fourth place bout. As fate would have it, it will be Sujeet Kalakal who will now strive to earn qualification in the 65kg for the Paris Games after winning a spot in the Indian team.

Sujeet had lost a legal case against Punia when he had challenged his direct entry for the Hangzhou Asian Games. Sujeet beat Rohit by technical superiority in the final. *—PTI*

Bajrang Punia and Ravi Dahiya are Tokyo Games medallists **PHOTO: PTI**

PREMIER LEAGUE

Tottenham tame 10-man Aston Villa 4-0

LONDON, 10 MARCH

Tottenham came away with a 4-0 victory over Aston Villa in the early kick-off on Sunday in the Premier League.

Ange Postecoglou made three changes to the Tottenham side that beat Crystal Palace the previous weekend at home for a game that his side came into in fifth place, five points behind Villa with a game in hand. Postecoglou's men also came to Villa Park with eight days' worth of work behind them on the pitches of Hotspur Way while Unai Emery's team were in action on Thursday night, drawing 0-0 at Ajax in the Europa Conference League.

For Spurs, Pedro Porro was back in the team after his hamstring injury and Pape Matar Sarr has had a better week following his back problem so the 21-year-old Senegal international started in the midfield with Rodrigo Bentancur dropping down to the bench.

Brennan Johnson made a big impact with two assists from the bench against Palace and he started with Timo Werner taking his place among the substitutes instead.

The first half brought little in the way of clear-cut chances for either side as Spurs held most of the ball but struggled to use it well enough in the Villa half. The hosts' half-chances came mainly from Tottenham's loose passes as they tried to play the ball out from the back.

Then five second-half minutes suddenly gave the match a different complexion. First Spurs lost Micky van de Ven to what looked like a hamstring injury in the 49th minute and just a minute later, Dejan Kulusevski sent Sarr away down the right and the young midfielder whipped in a pinpoint ball for James Maddison to touch home between two defenders. Three minutes later, Kulusevski won the ball back high up the pitch and Son Heung-min raced away before teeing up Johnson to curl home past Emiliano Martinez. *—AP*

Brennan Johnson scored Tottenham's second vs Aston Villa **PHOTO: AFP**